

PATH A: SOURCE TO ARS



FIG. 4a

PATH B: ARS TO SOURCE

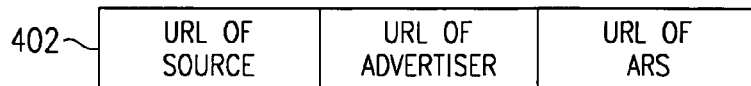


FIG. 4b

PATH C: SOURCE TO ADVERTISER



FIG. 4c

PATH D: ADVERTISER TO SOURCE



FIG. 4d

PATH E: ARS TO ADVERTISER (OPTIONAL)

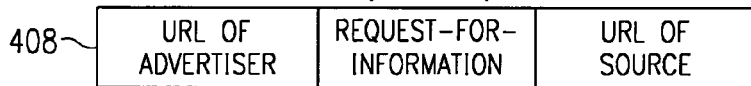


FIG. 4e

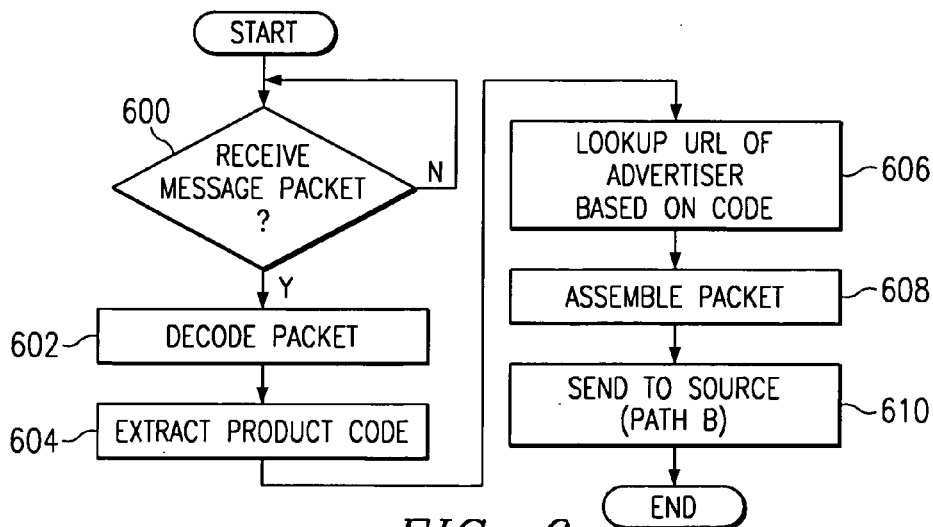


FIG. 6

FIG. 5

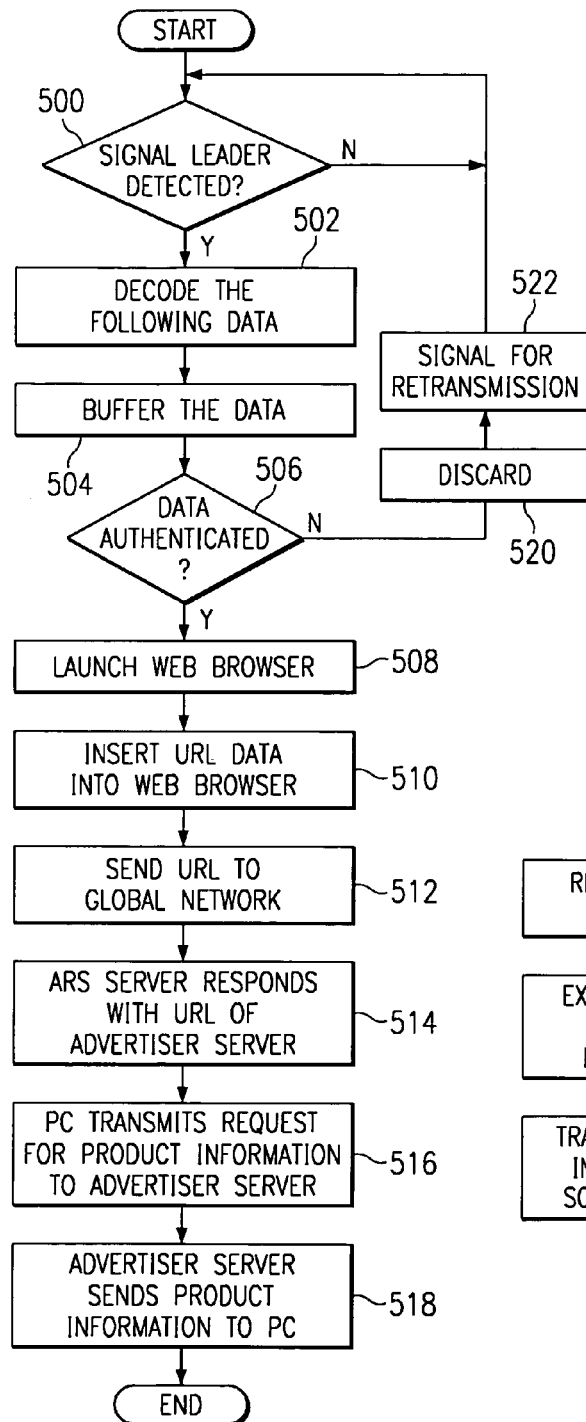
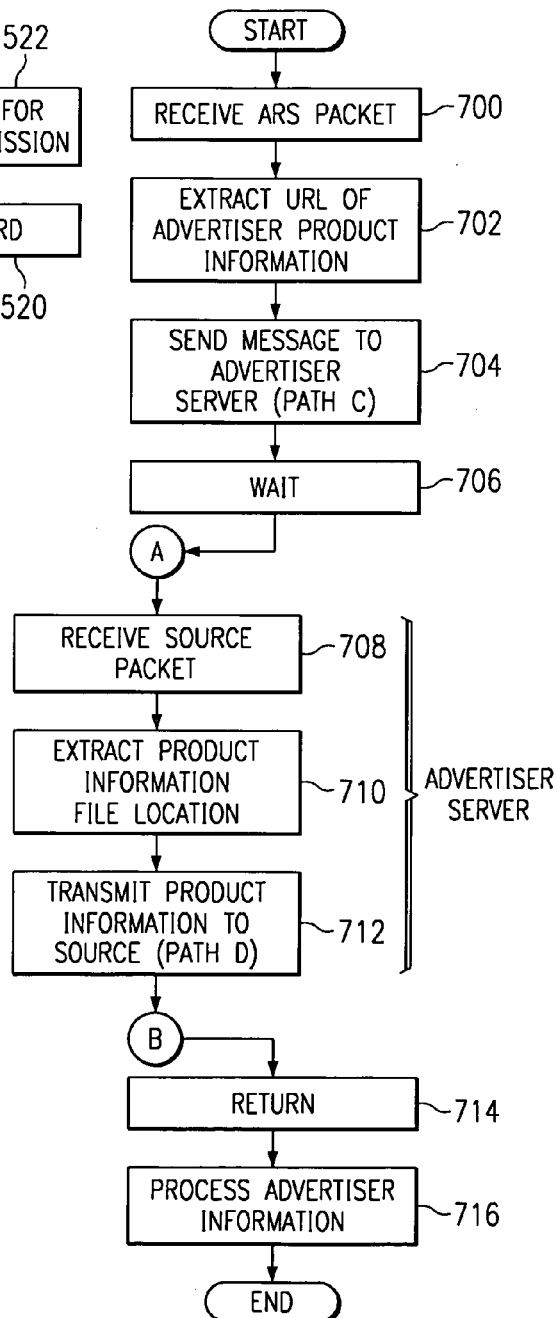


FIG. 7



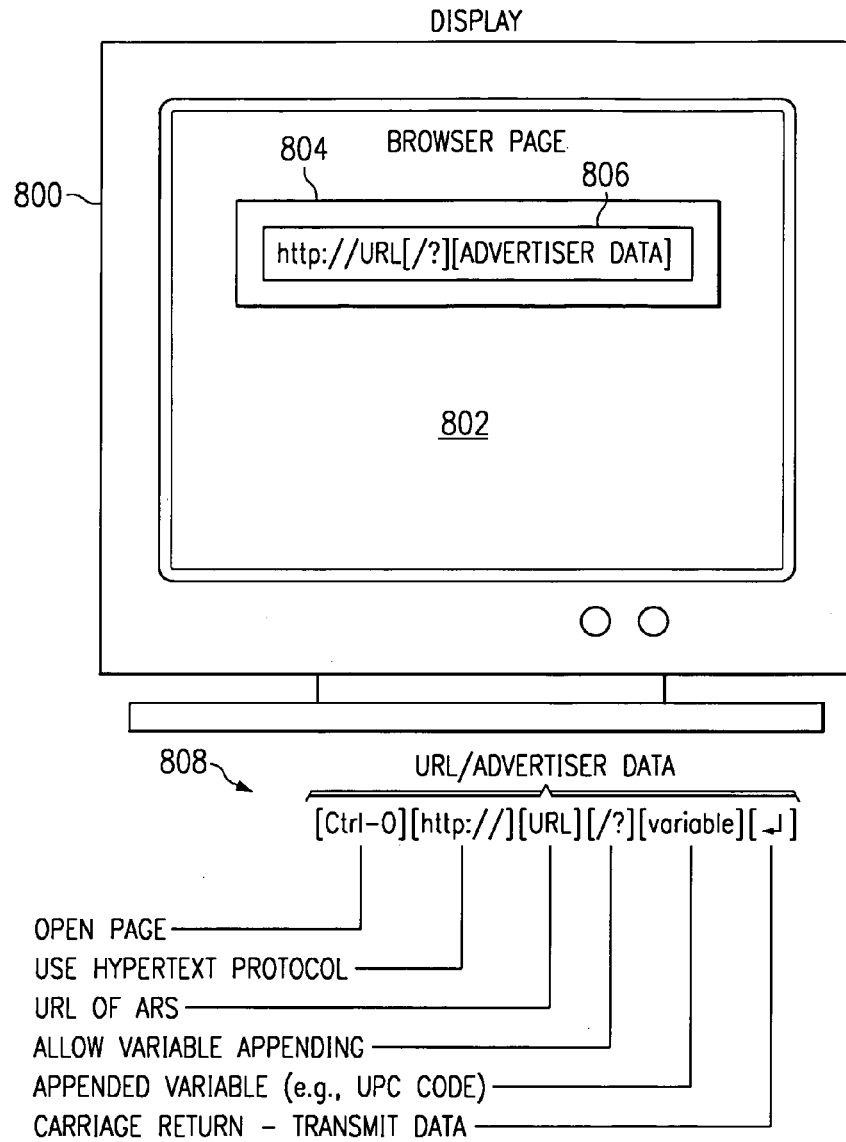


FIG. 8

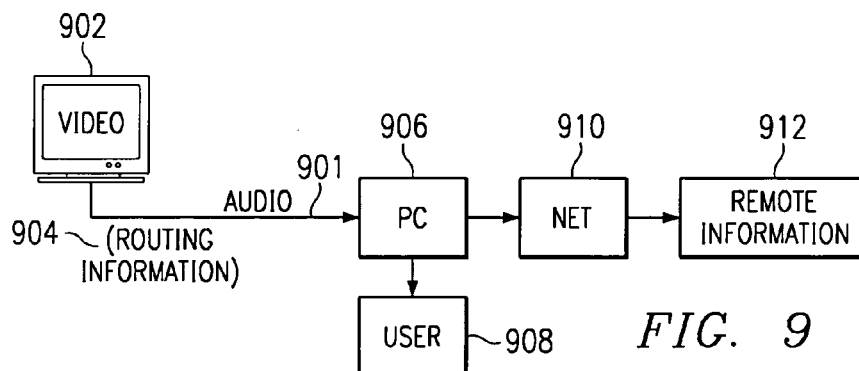


FIG. 9

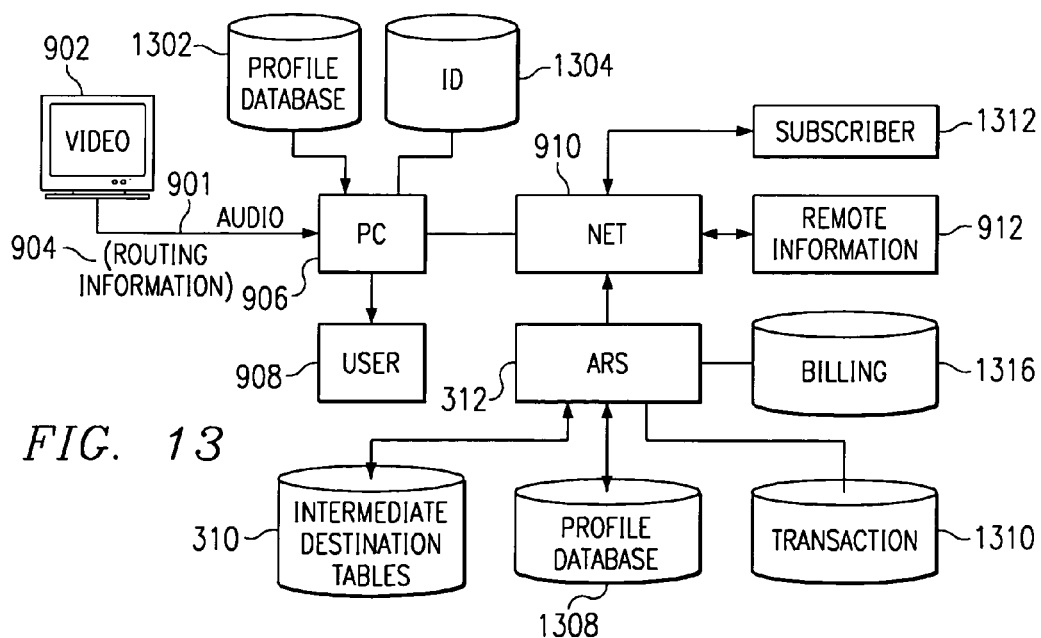
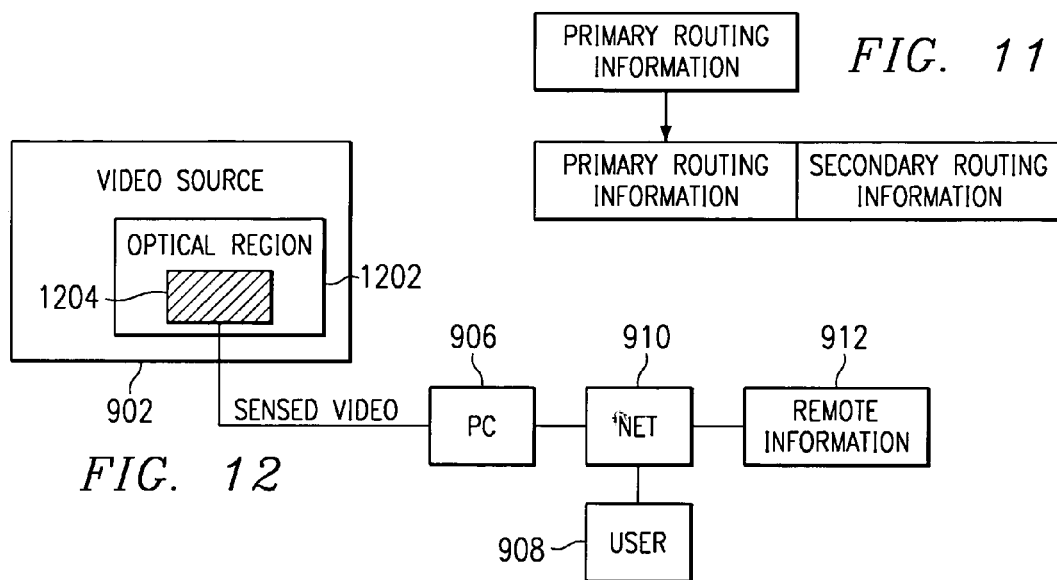
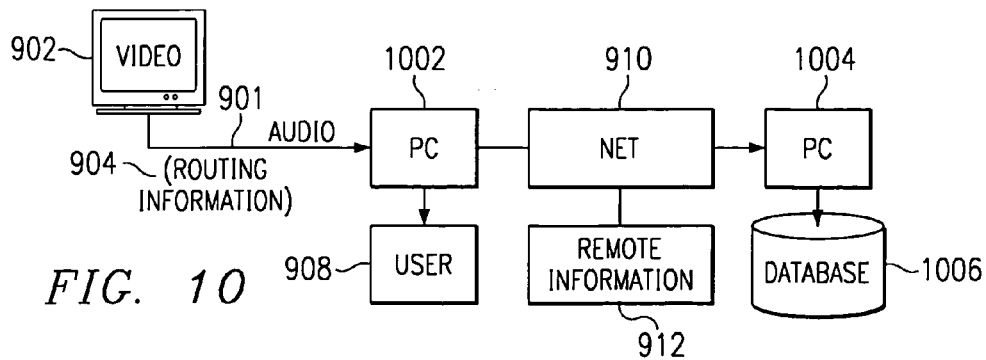


FIG. 14

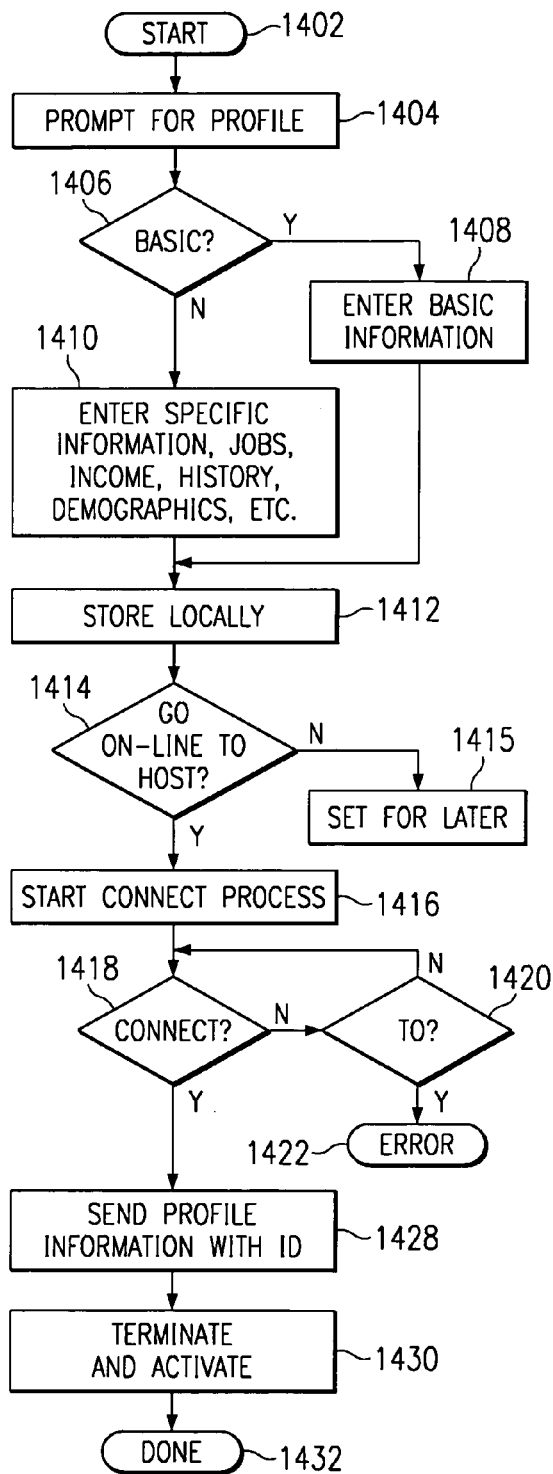
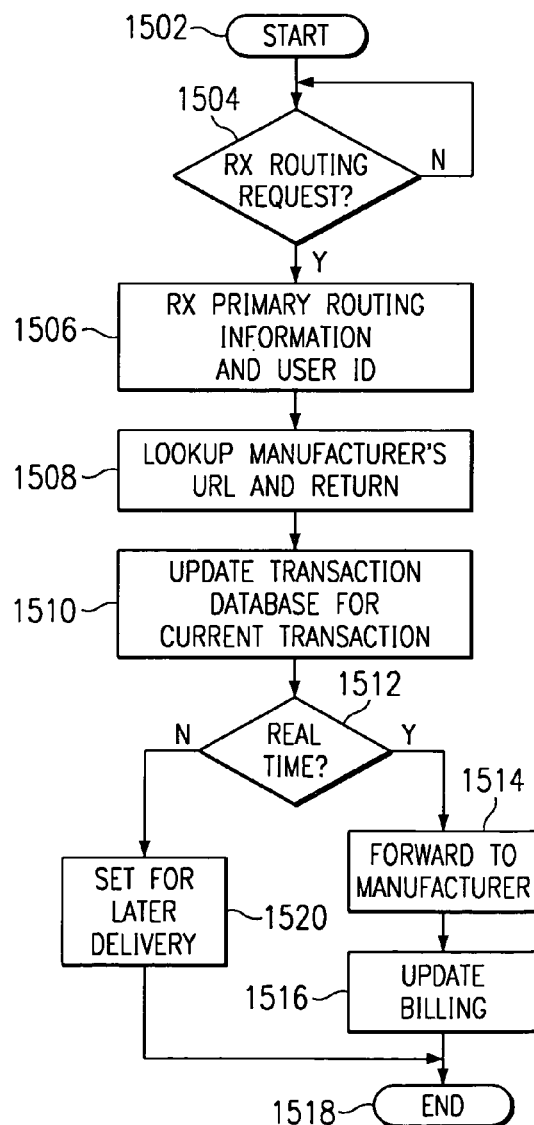
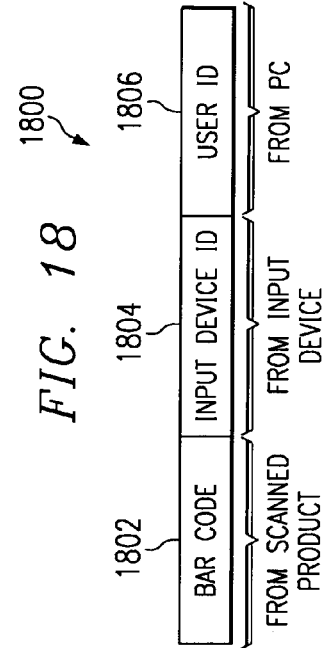
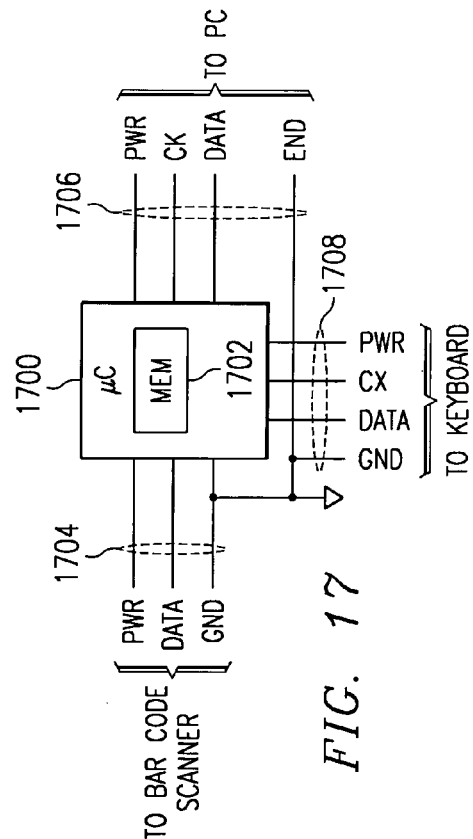
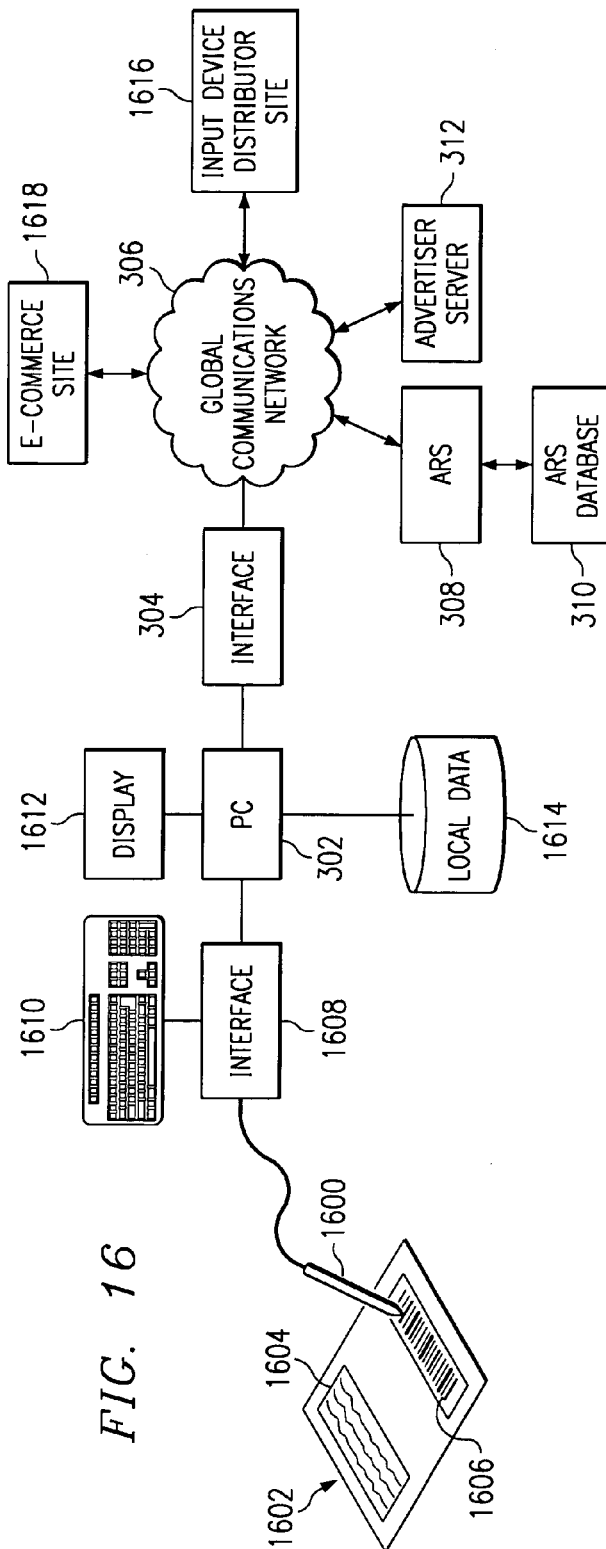


FIG. 15





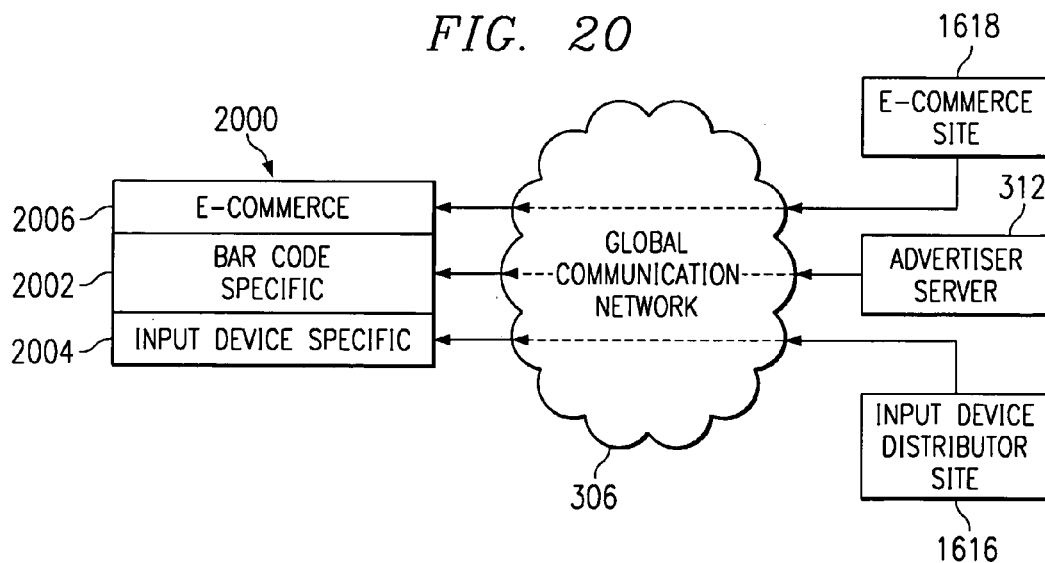
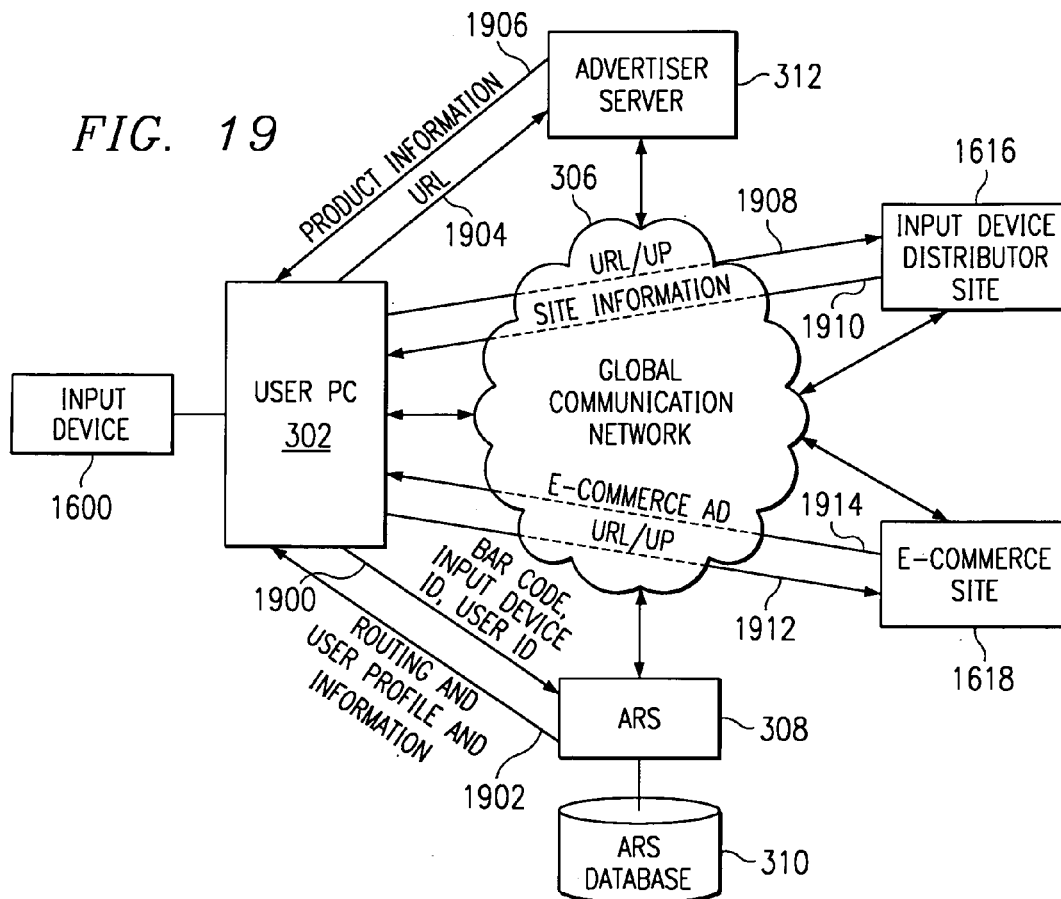


FIG. 21

2102		2104		2106	2108	
PRODUCT		INPUT DEVICE		USER	E-COMMERCE	
BAR CODE	ROUTE	ID	DISTRIBUTOR	PROFILE	BAR CODE	INFORMATION

ARS DATABASE

2100

FIG. 22

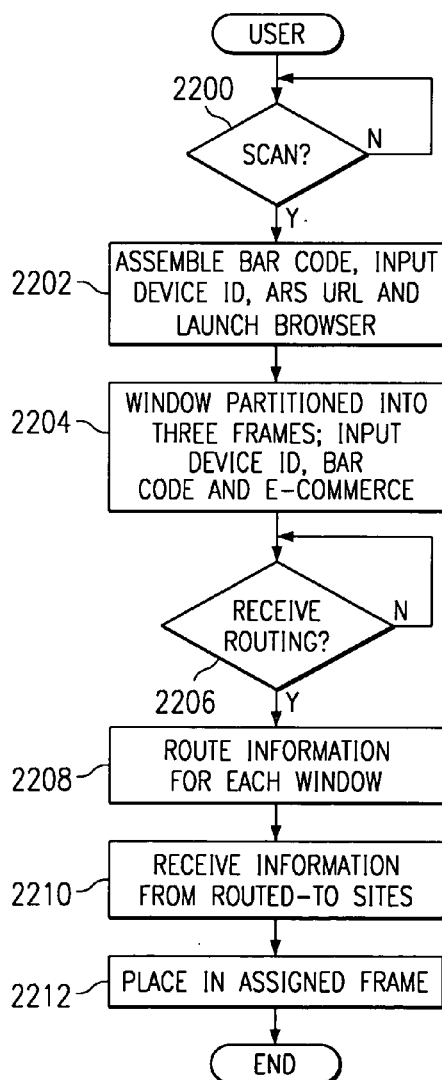


FIG. 23

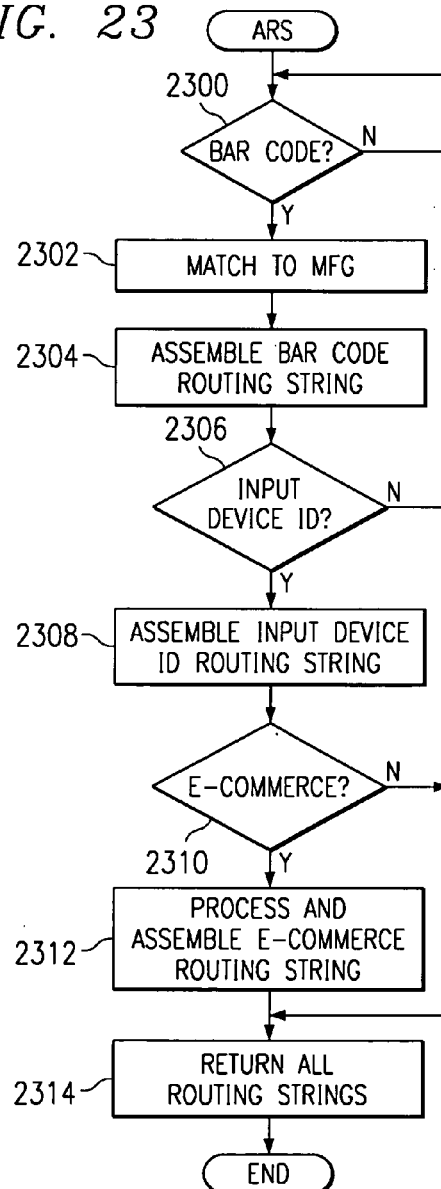
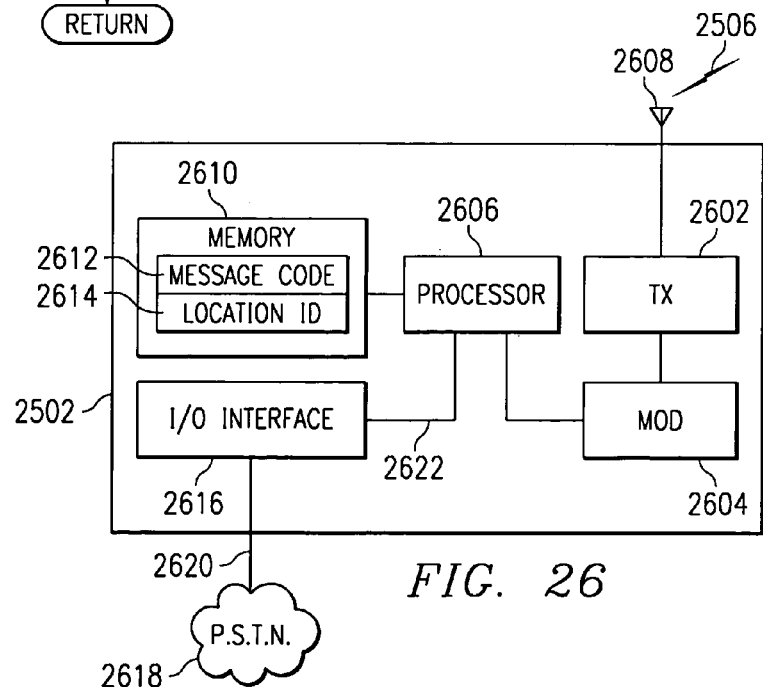
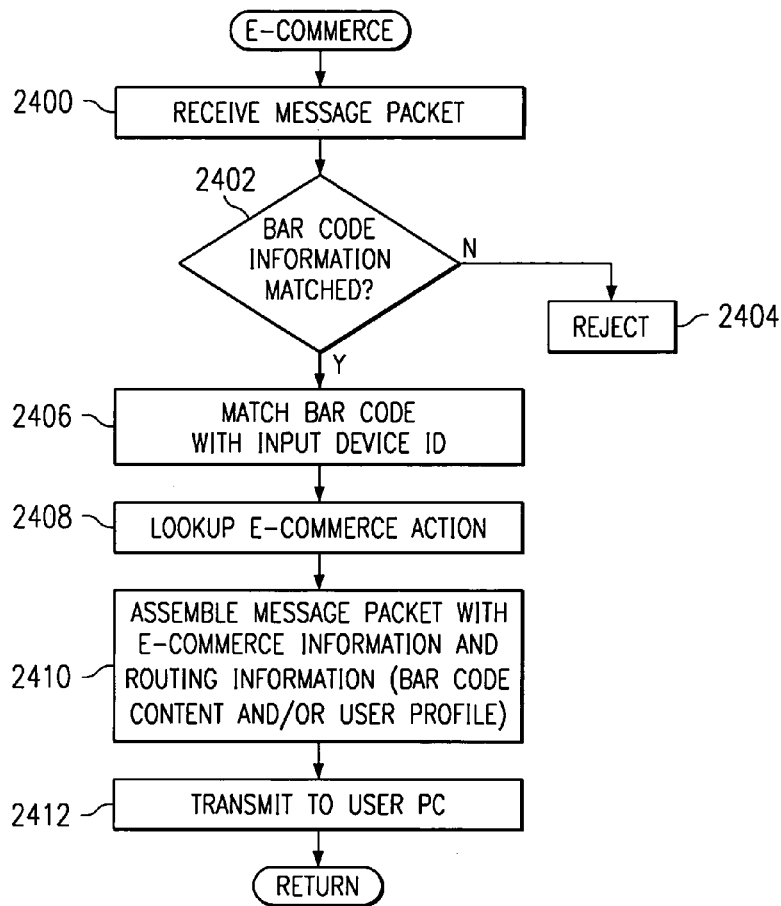


FIG. 24



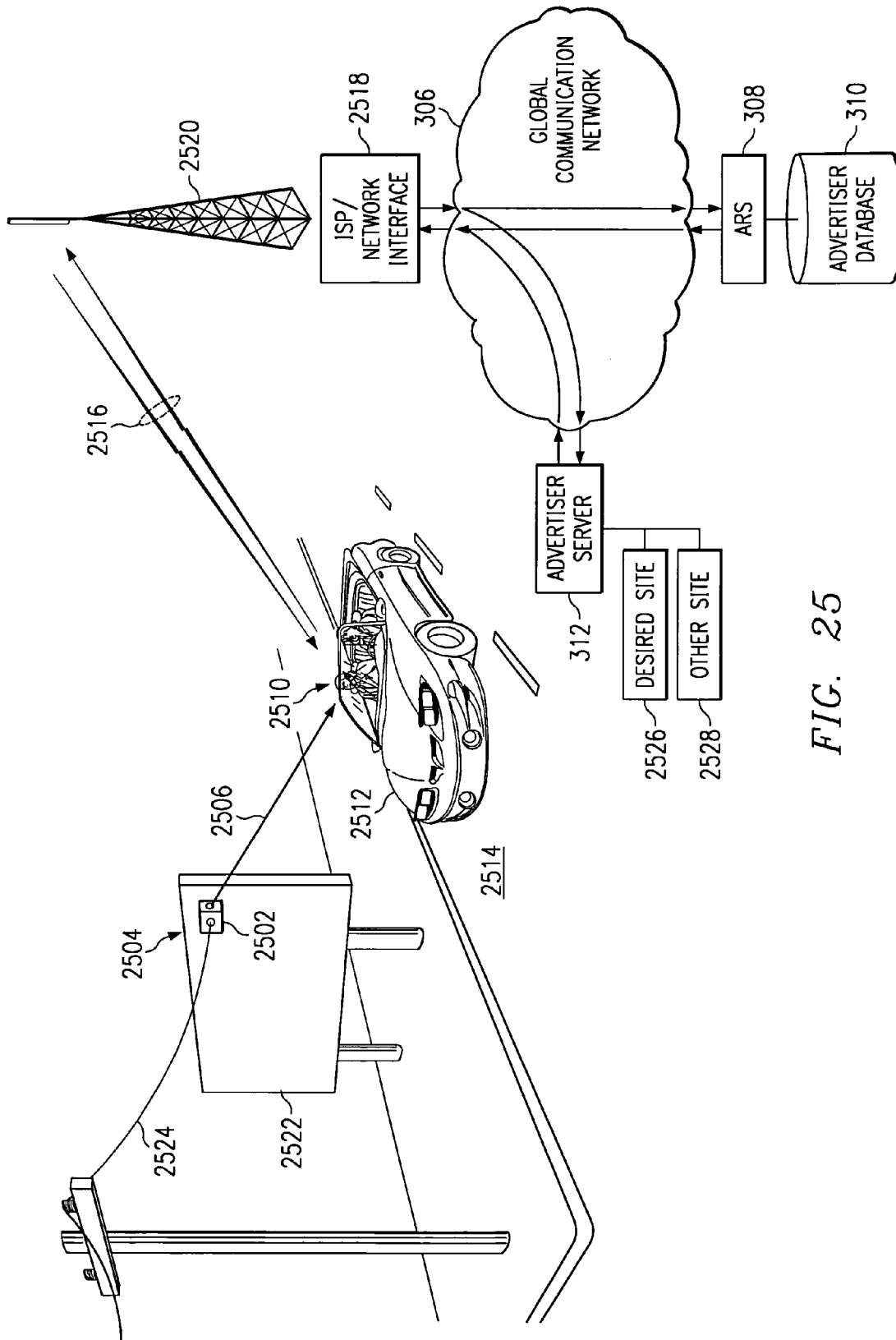


FIG. 25

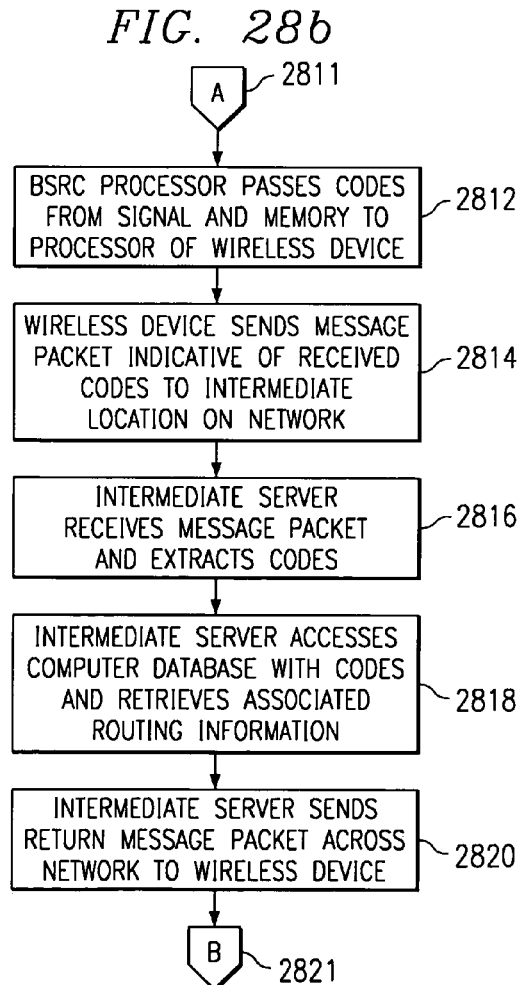
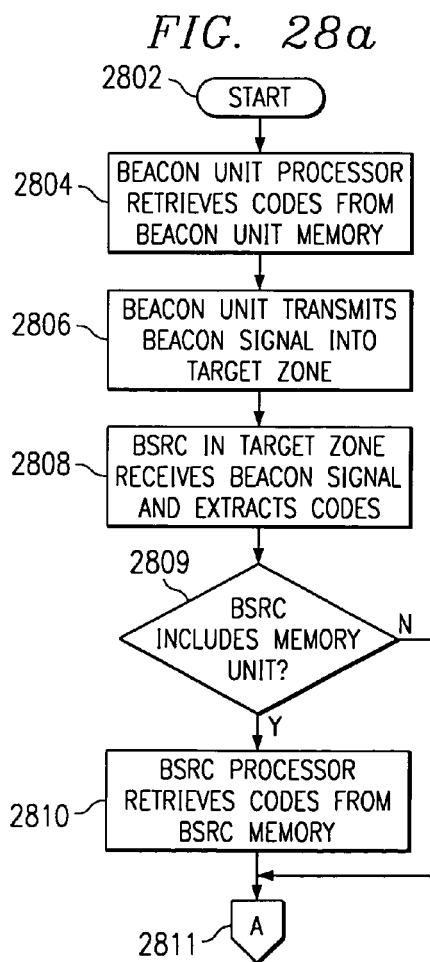
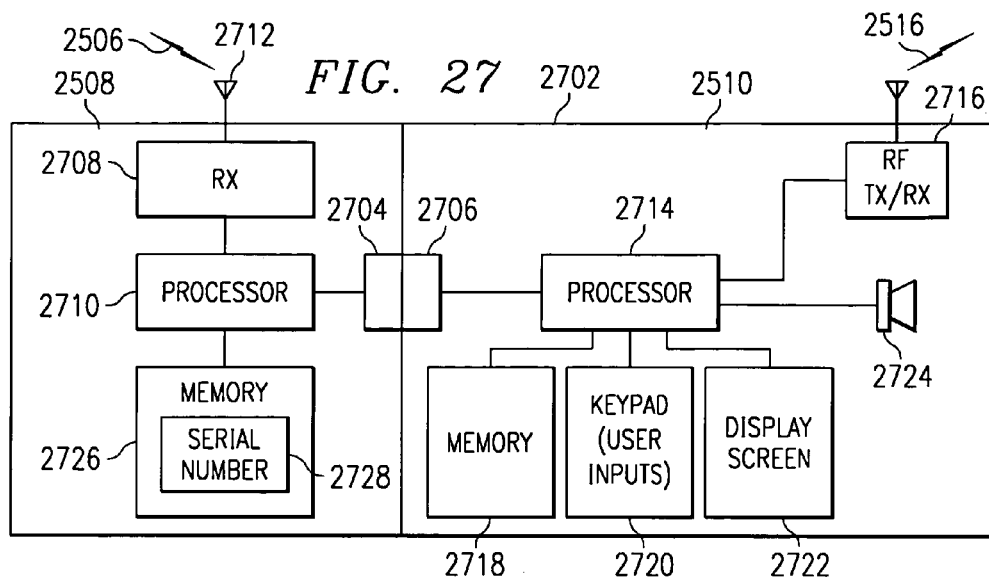


FIG. 28c

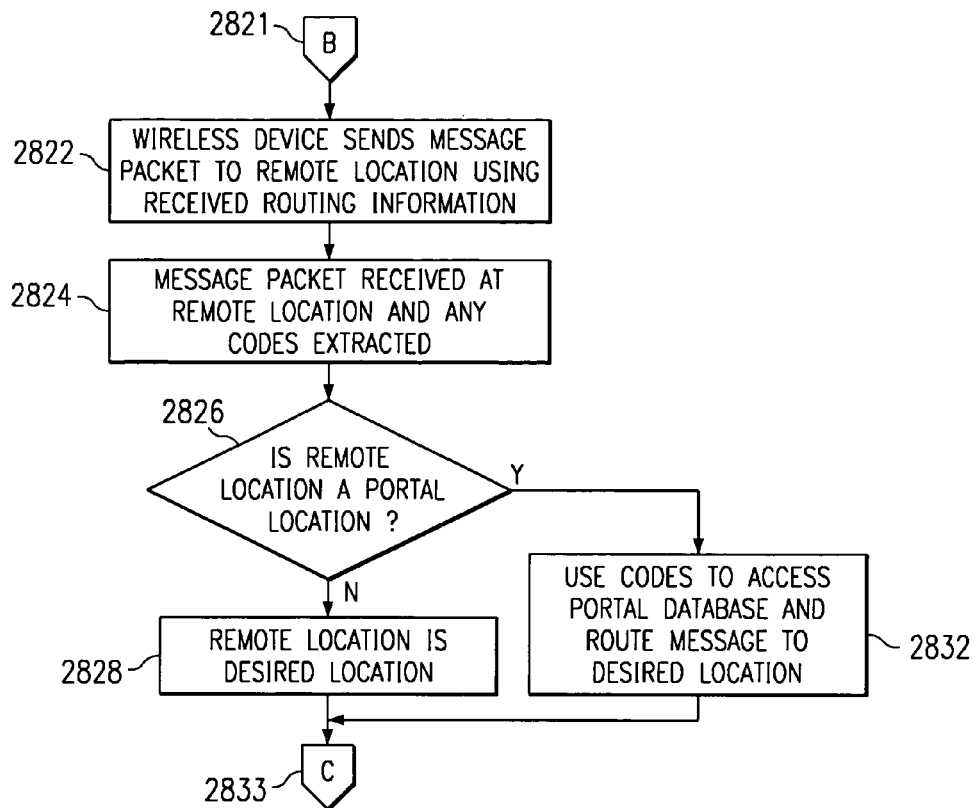
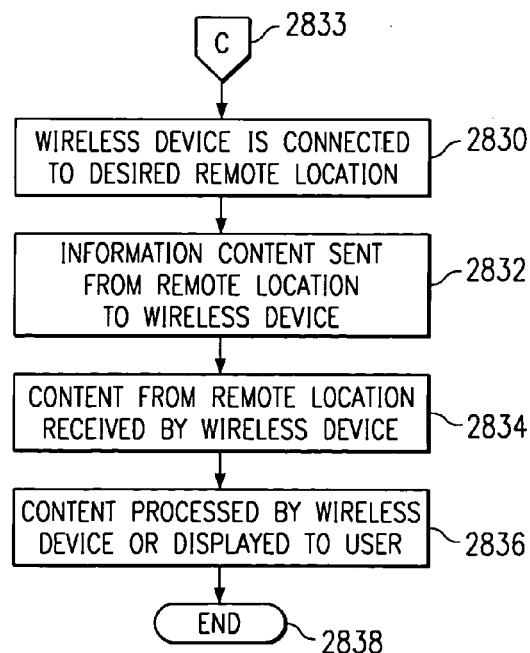


FIG. 28d



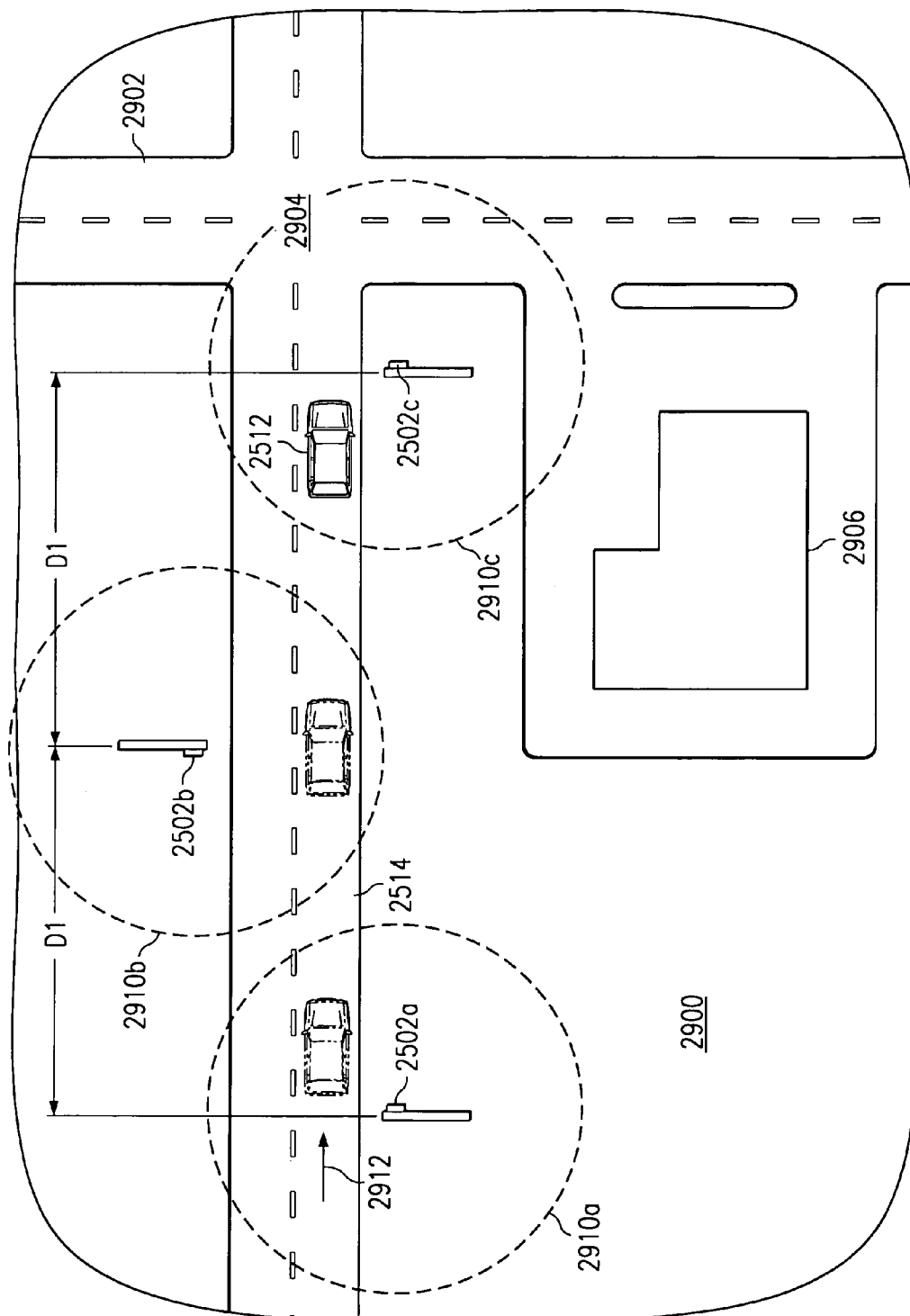


FIG. 29

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METHOD FOR CONNECTING A WIRELESS DEVICE TO A REMOTE LOCATION ON A NETWORK

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a Continuation-in-Part of pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/378,221 entitled "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR ACCESSING A REMOTE LOCATION BY SCANNING AN OPTICAL CODE" filed on Aug. 19, 1999, which is a Continuation-in-Part of the following two U.S. patent applications: Pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/151,471 entitled "METHOD FOR INTERFACING SCANNED PRODUCT INFORMATION WITH A SOURCE FOR THE PRODUCT OVER A GLOBAL NETWORK" filed on Sep. 11, 1998, and U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/151,530 entitled "METHOD FOR CONTROLLING A COMPUTER WITH AN AUDIO SIGNAL", also filed on Sep. 11, 1998, and issued as U.S. Pat. No. 6,098,106 on Aug. 1, 2000. This application is related to pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/703,465 entitled "SYSTEM AND APPARATUS FOR CONNECTING A WIRELESS DEVICE TO A REMOTE LOCATION ON A NETWORK" filed of even date herewith.

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention is related to an apparatus for computer control. In one aspect, it relates to an apparatus for automatically connecting a nearby wireless device to a remote location on a computer network.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Global communication networks such as the Internet provide businesses with a new infrastructure for reaching millions of potential customers. So-called "web pages" have become a major vehicle for providing information content (e.g., advertising) to users, and a convenient method for distributing information the users from remote locations on the network.

The emergence of e-commerce over the Internet, and the resulting scramble to capture the attention of users now demands more effective ways for vendors to direct their advertising to potential customers. Such efforts are complicated by the development of so-called wireless devices, e.g., mobile computers and other digital computing devices which are connected to the Internet by means of a radio frequency interface. These wireless devices are frequently employed while the user is actually moving, e.g., walking or traveling in an automobile, train, airplane, etc. Thus, new methods and apparatus are needed to facilitate connection of wireless devices to desired locations on the Internet.

It is known to connect a wireless device to a remote location on a network by manually inputting a network address. However, in many cases the address of a remote location is unknown or unavailable to the user. In other cases, the network address is available (e.g., displayed in advertising), but it is cumbersome or even unsafe (e.g., while driving a car) for the user to enter the desired address using the tiny buttons or stylus often associated with a wireless device. A need therefore exists, for a system for connecting a wireless device to a remote location on a network which does not require the user to manually input a network address.

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In many cases, an advertiser desires to provide the user of a wireless device with information or knowledge which is especially relevant to the user's current geographic location, e.g., nearby restaurants or shopping opportunities. Further, unless the user of a wireless device has a GPS or other positioning system available, the user typically does not know precisely what his or her current geographic location is. A need therefore exists, for a system for connecting a wireless device to a remote location on a network which is associated with the current geographic location of the wireless device, without requiring the wireless device or its user to provide any geographic location information.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention disclosed and claimed herein comprises, in one aspect thereof, a method for connecting a wireless device to a remote location on a computer network. A beacon signal is transmitted from a beacon unit disposed at a first geographic location. The beacon signal includes components indicative of a first code and of a second code, the first code being associated with a remote location on a computer network and the second code being associated with an attribute of the beacon unit. The beacon signal is received using a beacon signal receiver circuit disposed with a wireless device at a second geographic location. The first code and the second code are then extracted from the beacon signal. In response to receiving the beacon signal, control signals indicative of the first code and the second code are sent from the beacon signal receiver circuit to the wireless device. In response to receiving the control signals, an RF signal constituting a first message packet is transmitted from the wireless device to an intermediate location on the computer network. The first message packet is indicative of the first code and the second code. The first message packet is received at the intermediate location and the first code and the second code are extracted therefrom. A computer database is accessed from the intermediate location. The database includes a plurality of routing information for remote locations on the computer network and a plurality of first codes. Each of the routing information is associated with at least one of the first codes. The routing information associated with the first code received in the beacon signal is then retrieved, and a reply packet including the routing information is transmitted from the intermediate location across the computer network back to the wireless device. In response to receiving the reply packet, a second message packet is transmitted from the wireless device to a remote location on the network using the routing information just received, thereby connecting the wireless device to the associated remote location.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a more complete understanding of the present invention and the advantages thereof, reference is now made to the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying Drawings in which:

FIG. 1 illustrates a block diagram of the preferred embodiment;

FIG. 2 illustrates the computer components employed in this embodiment;

FIG. 3 illustrates system interactions over a global network;

FIGS. 4a-4e illustrate the various message packets transmitted between the source PC and network servers used in the preferred embodiment;

FIG. 5 is a flowchart depicting operation of the system according to the preferred embodiment;

FIG. 6 illustrates a flowchart of actions taken by the Advertiser Reference Server ("ARS") server;

FIG. 7 illustrates a flowchart of the interactive process between the source computer and ARS;

FIG. 8 illustrates a web browser page receiving the modified URL/advertiser product data according to the preferred embodiment;

FIG. 9 illustrates a simplified block diagram of the disclosed embodiment;

FIG. 10 illustrates a more detailed, simplified block diagram of the embodiment of FIG. 9;

FIG. 11 illustrates a diagrammatic view of a method for performing the routing operation;

FIG. 12 illustrates a block diagram of an alternate embodiment utilizing an optical region in the video image for generating the routing information;

FIG. 13 illustrates a block diagram illustrating the generation of a profile with the disclosed embodiment;

FIG. 14 illustrates a flowchart for generating the profile and storing at the ARS;

FIG. 15 illustrates a flowchart for processing the profile information when information is routed to a user;

FIG. 16 illustrates a general block diagram of a disclosed embodiment;

FIG. 17 illustrates the conversion circuit of the wedge interface;

FIG. 18 illustrates a sample message packet transmitted from the user PC to the ARS;

FIG. 19 illustrates a more detailed block diagram of the routing of the message packets between the various nodes;

FIG. 20 illustrates a block diagram of a browser window, according to a disclosed embodiment;

FIG. 21 illustrates a diagrammatic view of information contained in the ARS database;

FIG. 22 illustrates a flowchart of the process of receiving information from the user's perspective;

FIG. 23 illustrates a flowchart according to the ARS;

FIG. 24 illustrates a flowchart of the process performed at the E-commerce node;

FIG. 25 illustrates a diagrammatic view of a system for connecting a wireless device to a remote location on a network in accordance with another embodiment;

FIG. 26 illustrates a diagrammatic view of one embodiment of a beacon unit;

FIG. 27 illustrates a diagrammatic view of one embodiment of a beacon signal receiver circuit and the associated wireless device;

FIGS. 28a-28d illustrate a flowchart of a process for connecting a wireless device to a remote location on a computer network in accordance with another embodiment; and

FIG. 29 is a plan view of a geographic region containing an embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Referring now to FIG. 1, there is illustrated a block diagram of a system for controlling a personal computer ("PC") 112 via an audio tone transmitted over a wireless system utilizing a TV. In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 1, there is provided a transmission station 101 and a receive station 117 that are connected via a communication link 108. The transmission station 101 is comprised of a television program source 104, which is operable to generate a pro-

gram in the form of a broadcast signal comprised of video and audio. This is transmitted via conventional techniques along channels in the appropriate frequencies. The program source is input to a mixing device 106, which mixing device is operable to mix in an audio signal. This audio signal is derived from an audio source 100 which comprises a coded audio signal which is then modulated onto a carrier which is combined with the television program source 104. This signal combining can be done at the audio level, or it can even be done at the RF level in the form of a different carrier. However, the preferred method is to merely sum the audio signal from the modulator 102 into the audio channel of the program that is generated by the television program source 104. The output thereof is provided from the mixing device 106 in the form of broadcast signal to an antenna 107, which transmits the information over the communication link 108 to an antenna 109 on the receive side.

On the receive side of the system, a conventional receiver 110, such as a television is provided. This television provides a speaker output which provides the user with an audible signal. This is typically associated with the program. However, the receiver 110 in the disclosed embodiment, also provides an audio output jack, this being the type RCA jack. This jack is utilized to provide an audio output signal on a line 113 which is represented by an audio signal 111. This line 113 provides all of the audio that is received over the communication link 108 to the PC 112 in the audio input port on the PC 112. However, it should be understood that, although a direct connection is illustrated from the receiver 110 to the PC 112, there actually could be a microphone pickup at the PC 112 which could pick the audio signal up. In the disclosed embodiment, the audio signal generated by the advertiser data input device 100 is audible to the human ear and, therefore, can be heard by the user. Therefore, no special filters are needed to provide this audio to the PC 112.

The PC 112 is operable to run programs thereon which typically are stored in a program file area 1116. These programs can be any type of programs such as word processing programs, application programs, etc. In the disclosed embodiment, the program that is utilized in the system is what is referred to as a "browser." The PC 112 runs a browser program to facilitate the access of information on the network, for example, a global communication network known as the "Internet" or the World-Wide-Web ("Web"). The browser is a hypertext-linked application used for accessing information. Hypertext is a term used to describe a particular organization of information within a data processing system, and its presentation to a user. It exploits the computer's ability to link together information from a wide variety of sources to provide the user with the ability to explore a particular topic. The traditional style of presentation used in books employs an organization of the information which is imposed upon it by limitations of the medium, namely fixed sized, sequential paper pages. Hypertext systems, however, use a large number of units of text or other types of data such as image information, graphical information, video information, or sound information, which can vary in size. A collection of such units of information is termed a hypertext document, or where the hypertext documents employ information other than text, hypermedia documents. Multimedia communications may use the Hypertext Transfer Protocol ("HTTP"), and files or formatted data may use the Hypertext Markup Language ("HTML"). This formatting language provides for a mingling of text, graphics, sound, video, and hypertext links by "tagging" a text document using HTML. Data encoded using HTML is often referred to as an "HTML document,"

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an "HTML page," or a "home page." These documents and other Internet resources may be accessed across the network by means of a network addressing scheme which uses a locator referred to as a Uniform Resource Locator ("URL"), for example, "http://www.digital.com."

The Internet is one of the most utilized networks for interconnecting distributed computer systems and allows users of these computer systems to exchange data all over the world. Connected to the Internet are many private networks, for example, corporate or commercial networks. Standard protocols, such as the Transport Control Protocol ("TCP") and the Internet Protocol ("IP") provide a convenient method for communicating across these diverse networks. These protocols dictate how data are formatted and communicated. As a characteristic of the Internet, the protocols are layered in an IP stack. At higher levels of the IP stack, such as the application layer (where HTTP is employed), the user information is more readily visible, while at lower levels, such as the network level (where TCP/IP are used), the data can merely be observed as packets or a stream of rapidly moving digital signals. Superimposed on the Internet is a standard protocol interface for accessing Web resources, such as servers, files, Web pages, mail messages, and the like. One way that Web resources can be accessed is by browsers made by Netscape® and Microsoft Internet Explorer®.

Referring again now to FIG. 1, the user can load this program with the appropriate keystrokes such that a browser window will be displayed on a display 118. In one embodiment, the user can run the browser program on the PC 112 such that the browser window is displayed on the display 118. While watching a preferred program, the user can also view display 118. When an audio signal is received by the receiver 110 and the encoded information is contained therein that was input thereto by the advertiser, the PC 112 will then perform a number of operations. The first operation, according to the disclosed embodiment, is to extract the audio information within the received audio signal in the form of digital data, and then transmit this digital data to a defined location on the global communication network via a modem connection 114. This connection will be described hereinbelow. This information will be relayed to a proprietary location and the instructions sent back to the PC 112 as to the location of the advertiser associated with the code, and the PC 112 will then effect a communication link to that location such that the user can view on the display 118 information that the advertiser, by the fact of putting the tone onto the broadcast channel, desires the viewer to view. This information can be in the form of interactive programs, data files, etc. In one example, when an advertisement appears on the television, the tone can be generated and then additional data displayed on the display 118. Additionally, a streaming video program could be played on the PC received over the network, which streaming video program is actually longer than the advertising segment on the broadcast. Another example would be a sports game that would broadcast the tone in order to allow a user access to information that is not available over the broadcast network, such as additional statistics associated with the sports program, etc.

By utilizing the system described herein with respect to the disclosed embodiment of FIG. 1, an advertiser is allowed the ability to control a user's PC 112 through the use of tones embedded within a program audio signal. As will be described hereinbelow, the disclosed embodiment utilizes particular routing information stored in the PC 112 which allows the encoded information in the received audio signal to route this information to a desired location on the network, and

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then allow other routing information to be returned to the PC 112 for control thereof to route the PC 112 to the appropriate location associated with that code.

Referring now to FIG. 2, there is illustrated a computer 204, similar to computer 112, connected to display information on display 118. The computer 204 comprises an internal audio or "sound" card 206 for receiving the transmitted audio signal through receive antenna 109 and receiver 110. The sound card 206 typically contains analog-to-digital circuitry for converting the analog audio signal into a digital signal. The digital signal may then be more easily manipulated by software programs. The receiver 110 separates the audio signal from the video signal. A special trigger signal located within the transmitted advertiser audio signal triggers proprietary software running on the computer 204 which launches a communication application, in this particular embodiment, the web browser application located on the PC 204. Coded advertiser information contained within the audio signal is then extracted and appended with the address of a proprietary server located on the communication network.

The remote server address is in the form of a URL. This appended data, in addition to other control codes, is inserted directly into the web browser application for automatic routing to the communication network. The web browser running on PC 204, and communicating to the network with an internal modem 208, in this embodiment, transmits the advertiser information to the remote server. The remote server cross-references the advertiser product information to the address of the advertiser server located on the network. The address of the advertiser server is routed back through the PC 204 web browser to the advertiser server. The advertiser product information is returned to PC 204 to be presented to the viewer on display 118. In this particular embodiment, the particular advertiser product information displayed is contained within the advertiser's web page 212. As mentioned above, the audio signal is audible to the human ear. Therefore the audio signal, as emitted from the TV speakers, may be input to the sound card 206 via a microphone. Furthermore, the audio signal need not be a real-time broadcast, but may be on video tapes, CDS, DVD, or other media which may be displayed at a later date. With the imminent implementation of high definition digital television, the audio signal output from the TV may also be digital. Therefore, direct input into a sound card for A/D purposes may not be necessary, but alternative interfacing techniques to accommodate digital-to-digital signal formats would apply.

Referring now to FIG. 3, there is illustrated a source PC 302, similar to PCS 204 and 112, connected to a global communication network ("GCN") 306 through an interface 304. In this embodiment, the audio signal 111 is received by PC 302 through its sound card 206. The audio signal 111 comprises a trigger signal which triggers proprietary software into launching a web browser application residing on the PC 302. The audio signal 111 also comprises advertiser product information which is extracted and appended with URL information of an Advertiser Reference Server ("ARS") 308. The ARS 308 is a system disposed on the GCN 306 that is defined as the location to which data in the audio signal 111 is to be routed. As such, data in the audio signal 111 will always be routed to the ARS 308, since a URL is unique on the GCN 306. Connected to the ARS 308 is a database 310 of product codes and associated manufacturer URLs. The database 310 undergoes a continual update process which is transparent to the user. As companies sign-on, i.e., subscribe, to this technology, manufacturer and

product information is added to the database 310 without interrupting operation of the source PC 302 with frequent updates. When the advertiser server address URL is obtained from the ARS database 310, it and the request for the particular advertiser product information are automatically routed back through the web browser on PC 302, over to the respective advertiser server for retrieval of the advertiser product information to the PC 302. Additionally, although the disclosed invention discusses a global communication network, the system is also applicable to LANs, WANs, and peer-to-peer network configurations. It should be noted that the disclosed architecture is not limited to a single source PC 302, but may comprise a plurality of source PCs, e.g., PC 300 and PC 303. Moreover, a plurality of ARS 308 systems and advertiser servers 312 may be implemented, e.g., ARS 314, and advertiser server A 316, respectively.

The information transactions, in general, which occur between the networked systems of this embodiment, over the communication network, are the following. The web browser running on source PC 302 transmits a message packet to the ARS 308 over Path "A." The ARS 308 decodes the message packet and performs a cross-reference function with product information extracted from the received message packet to obtain the address of an advertiser server 312. A new message packet is assembled comprising the advertiser server 312 address, and sent back to the source PC 302 over Path "B." A "handoff" operation is performed whereby the source PC 302 browser simply reroutes the information on to the advertiser server 312 over Path "C," with the appropriate source and destination address appended. The advertiser server 312 receives and decodes the message packet. The request-for-advertiser-product-information is extracted and the advertiser 312 retrieves the requested information from its database for transmission back to the source PC 302 over Path "D." The source PC 302 then processes the information, i.e., for display to the viewer. The optional Path "E" is discussed hereinbelow. It should be noted that the disclosed methods are not limited to only browser communication applications, but may accommodate, with sufficient modifications by one skilled in the art, other communication applications used to transmit information over the Internet or communication network.

Referring now to FIG. 4a, the message packet 400 sent from the source PC 302 to ARS 308 via Path "A" comprises several fields. One field comprises the URL of the ARS 308 which indicates where the message packet is to be sent. Another field comprises the advertiser product code or other information derived from the audio signal 111, and any additional overhead information required for a given transaction. The product code provides a link to the address of the advertiser server 312, located in the database 310. Yet another field comprises the network address of the source PC 302. In general, network transmissions are effected in packets of information, each packet providing a destination address, a source address, and data. These packets vary depending upon the network transmission protocol utilized for communication. Although the protocols utilized in the disclosed embodiment are of a conventional protocol suite commonly known as TCP/IP, it should be understood that any protocols providing the similar basic functions can be used, with the primary requirement that a browser can forward the routing information to the desired URL in response to keystrokes being input to a PC. Within the context of this disclosure, "message packet" shall refer to and comprise the destination URL, product information, and source address, even though more than a single packet must be transmitted to effect such a transmission.

Upon receipt of the message packet 400 from source PC 302, ARS 308 processes the information in accordance with instructions embedded in the overhead information. The ARS 308 specifically will extract the product code information from the received packet 400 and, once extracted, will then decode this product code information. Once decoded, this information is then compared with data contained within the ARS advertiser database 310 to determine if there is a "hit." If there is no "hit" indicating a match, then information is returned to the browser indicating such. If there is a "hit," a packet 402 is assembled which comprises the address of the source PC 302, and information instructing the source PC 302 as to how to access, directly in a "handoff" operation, another location on the network, that of an advertiser server 312. This type of construction is relatively conventional with browsers such as Netscape® and Microsoft Internet Explorer® and, rather than displaying information from the ARS 308, the source PC 302 can then access the advertiser server 312. The ARS 308 transmits the packet 402 back to source PC 302 over Path "B." Referring now to FIG. 4b, the message packet 402 comprises the address of the source PC 302, the URL of the advertiser server 312 embedded within instructional code, and the URL of the ARS 308.

Upon receipt of the message packet 402 by the source PC 302, the message packet 402 is disassembled to obtain pertinent routing information for assembly of a new message packet 404. The web browser running on source PC 302 is now directed to obtain, over Path "C," the product information relevant to the particular advertiser server 312 location information embedded in message packet 404. Referring now to FIG. 4c, the message packet 404 for this transaction comprises the URL of the advertiser server 312, the request-for-product-information data, and the address of the source PC 302.

Upon receipt of the message packet 404 from source PC 302, advertiser server 312 disassembles the message packet 404 to obtain the request-for-product-information data. The advertiser server 312 then retrieves the particular product information from its database, and transmits it over Path "D" back to the source PC 302. Referring now to FIG. 4d, the message packet 406 for this particular transaction comprises the address of the source PC 302, the requested information, and the URL of the advertiser server 312.

Optionally, the ARS 308 may make a direct request for product information over Path "E" to advertiser server 312. In this mode, the ARS 308 sends information to the advertiser server 312 instructing it to contact the source PC 302. This, however, is unconventional and requires more complex software control. The message packet 408 for this transaction is illustrated in FIG. 4e, which comprises the URL of the advertiser server 312, the request-for-product-information data, and the address of the source PC 302. Since product information is not being returned to the ARS 308, but directly to the source PC 302, the message packet 408 requires the return address to be that of the source PC 302. The product information is then passed directly to PC 302 over Path "D."

Referring now to FIG. 5, the method for detecting and obtaining product information is as follows. In decision block 500, a proprietary application running resident on a source computer PC 302 (similar to PC 204) monitors the audio input for a special trigger signal. Upon detection of the trigger signal, data following the trigger signal is decoded for further processing, in function block 502. In function block 504, the data is buffered for further manipulation. In decision block 506, a determination is made as to whether

the data can be properly authenticated. If not, program flow continues through the "N" signal to function block 520 where the data is discarded. In function block 522, the program then signals for a retransmission of the data. The system then waits for the next trigger signal, in decision block 500. If properly authenticated in decision block 506, program flow continues through the "Y" signal path where the data is then used to launch the web browser application, as indicated in function block 508. In function block 510, the web browser receives the URL data, which is then automatically routed through the computer modem 208 to the network interface 304 and ultimately to the network 306. In function block 514, the ARS 308 responds by returning the URL of advertiser server 312 to the PC 302. In function block 516, the web browser running on the source PC 302, receives the advertiser URL information from the ARS 308, and transmits the URL for the product file to the advertiser server 312. In block 518, the advertiser server 312 responds by sending the product information to the source PC 302 for processing.

The user may obtain the benefits of this architecture by simply downloading the proprietary software over the network. Other methods for obtaining the software are well-known; for example, by CD, diskette, or pre-loaded hard drives.

Referring now to FIG. 6, there is illustrated a flowchart of the process the ARS 308 may undergo when receiving the message packet 400 from the source PC 302. In decision block 600, the ARS 308 checks for the receipt of the message packet 400. If a message packet 400 is not received, program flow moves along the "N" path to continue waiting for the message. If the message packet 400 is received, program flow continues along path "Y" for message processing. Upon receipt of the message packet 400, in function block 602, the ARS 308 decodes the message packet 400. The product code is then extracted independently in function block 604 in preparation for matching the product code with the appropriate advertiser server address located in the database 310. In function block 606, the product code is then used with a lookup table to retrieve the advertiser server 312 URL of the respective product information contained in the audio signal data. In function block 608, the ARS 308 then assembles message packet 402 for transmission back to the source PC 302. Function block 610 indicates the process of sending the message packet 402 back to the source PC 302 over Path "B."

Referring now to FIG. 7, there is illustrated a flowchart of the interactive processes between the source PC 302 and the advertiser server 312. In function block 700, the source PC 302 receives the message packet 402 back from the ARS 308 and begins to decode the packet 402. In function block 702, the URL of the advertiser product information is extracted from the message packet 402 and saved for insertion into the message packet 404 to the advertiser server 312. The message packet 404 is then assembled and sent by the source PC 302 over Path "C" to the advertiser server 312, in function block 704. While the source PC 302 waits, in function block 706, the advertiser server 312 receives the message packet 404 from the source PC 302, in function block 708, and disassembles it. The product information location is then extracted from the message packet 404 in function block 710. The particular product information is retrieved from the advertiser server 312 database for transmission back to the source PC 302. In function block 712, the product information is assembled into message packet 406 and then transmitted back to the source PC 302 over Path "D." Returning to the source PC 302 in function block 714, the advertiser

product information contained in the message packet 406 received from the advertiser server 312, is then extracted and processed in function block 716.

Referring now to FIG. 8, after receipt of a trigger signal, a web browser application on a source PC 302 is automatically launched and computer display 800 presents a browser page 802. Proprietary software running on the source PC 302 processes the audio signal data after being digitized through the sound card 206. The software appropriately prepares the data for insertion directly into the web browser by extracting the product information code and appending keystroke data to this information. First, a URL page 804 is opened in response to a Ctrl-O command added by the proprietary software as the first character string. Opening URL page 804 automatically positions the cursor in a field 806 where additional keystroke data following the Ctrl-O command will be inserted. After URL page 804 is opened, the hypertext protocol preamble http:// is inserted into the field 806. Next, URL information associated with the location of the ARS 308 is inserted into field 806. Following the ARS 308 URL data are the characters /? to allow entry of variables immediately following the /? characters. In this embodiment, the variable following is the product information code received in the audio signal. The product code information also provides the cross-reference information for obtaining the advertiser URL from the ARS database 310. Next, a carriage return is added to send the URL/product data and close the window 804. After the message packet 400 is transmitted to the ARS 308 from the source PC 302, transactions from the ARS 308, to the source PC 302, to the advertiser server 312, and back to the source PC 302, occur quickly and are transparent to the viewer. At this point, the next information the viewer sees is the product information which was received from the advertiser server 312.

Referring now to FIG. 9, there is illustrated a block diagram of a more simplified embodiment. In this embodiment, a video source 902 is provided which is operable to provide an audio output on an audio cable 901 which provides routing information referred to by reference numeral 904. The routing information 904 is basically information contained within the audio signal. This is an encoded or embedded signal. The important aspect of the routing information 904 is that it is automatically output in realtime as a function of the broadcast of the video program received over the video source 902. Therefore, whenever the program is being broadcast in realtime to the user 908, the routing information 904 will be output whenever the producer of the video desires it to be produced. It should be understood that the box 902 representing the video source could be any type of media that will result in the routing information being output. This could be a cassette player, a DVD player, an audio cassette, a CD ROM or any such media. It is only important that this is a program that the producer develops which the user 908 watches in a continuous or a streaming manner. Embedded within that program, at a desired point selected by the producer, the routing information 904 is output.

The audio information is then routed to a PC 906, which is similar to the PC 112 in FIG. 1. A user 908 is interfaced with the PC to receive information thereof, the PC 906 having associated therewith a display (not shown). The PC 906 is interfaced with a network 910, similar to the network 306 in FIG. 3. This network 910 has multiple nodes thereon, one of which is the PC 906, and another of which is represented by a network node 912 which represents remote information. The object of the present embodiment is to access remote information for display to the user 908 by the

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act of transmitting from the video program in block 902 the routing information 904. This routing information 904 is utilized to allow the PC 906 which has a network "browser" running thereon to "fetch" the remote information at the node 912 over the network 910 for display to the user 908. This routing information 904 is in the form of an embedded code within the audio signal, as was described hereinabove.

Referring now to FIG. 10, there is illustrated a more detailed block diagram of the embodiment of FIG. 9. In this embodiment, the PC 906 is split up into a couple of nodes, a first PC 1002 and a second PC 1004. The PC 1002 resides at the node associated with the user 908, and the PC 1004 resides at another node. The PC 1004 represents the ARS 308 of FIG. 3. The PC 1004 has a database 1006 associated therewith, which is basically the advertiser database 310. Therefore, there are three nodes on the network 910 necessary to implement the disclosed embodiment, the PC 1002, the PC 1004 and the remote information node 912. The routing information 904 is utilized by the PC 1002 for routing to the PC 1004 to determine the location of the remote information node 912 on the network 910. This is returned to the PC 1002 and a connection made directly with the remote information node 912 and the information retrieved therefrom to the user 908. The routing information 904 basically constitutes primary routing information.

Referring now to FIG. 11, there is illustrated a diagrammatic view of how the network packet is formed for sending the primary routing information to the PC 1004. In general, the primary routing information occupies a single field which primary routing information is then assembled into a data packet with the secondary routing information for transfer to the network 910. This is described hereinabove in detail.

Referring now to FIG. 12, there is illustrated an alternate embodiment to that of FIG. 9. In this embodiment, the video source 902 has associated therewith an optical region 1202, which optical region 1202 has disposed therein an embedded video code. This embedded video code could be relatively complex or as simple as a grid of dark and white regions, each region in the grid able to have a dark color for a logic "1" or a white region for a logic "0." This will allow a digital value to be disposed within the optical region 1202. A sensor 1204 can then be provided for sensing this video code. In the example above, this would merely require an array of optical detectors, one for each region in the grid to determine whether this is a logic "1" or a logic "0" state. One of the sensed video is then output to the PC 906 for processing thereof to determine the information contained therein, which information contained therein constitutes the primary routing information 904. Thereafter, it is processed as described hereinabove with reference to FIG. 9.

Referring now to FIG. 13, there is illustrated a block diagram for an embodiment wherein a user's profile can be forwarded to the original subscriber or manufacturer. The PC 906 has associated therewith a profile database 1302, which profile database 1302 is operable to store a profile of the user 908. This profile is created when the program, after initial installation, requests profile information to be input in order to activate the program. In addition to the profile, there is also a unique ID that is provided to the user 908 in association with the browser program that runs on the PC 906. This is stored in a storage location represented by a block 1304. This ID 1304 is accessible by a remote location as a "cookie" which is information that is stored in the PC 906 in an accessible location, which accessible location is actually accessible by the remote program running on a remote node.

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The ARS 308, which basically constitutes the PC 1004 of FIG. 10, is operable to have associated therewith a profile database 1308, which profile database 1308 is operable to store profiles for all of the users. The profile database 1308 is a combination of the stored in profile database 1302 for all of the PCS 906 that are attachable to the system. This is to be distinguished from information stored in the database 310 of the ARS 308, the advertiser's database, which contains intermediate destination tables. When the routing information in the primary routing information 904 is forwarded to the ARS 308 and extracted from the original data packet, the lookup procedure described hereinabove can then be performed to determine where this information is to be routed. The profile database 1302 is then utilized for each transaction, wherein each transaction in the form of the routing information received from the primary routing information 904 is compared to the destination tables of database 310 to determine what manufacturer is associated therewith.

The associated ID 1304 that is transmitted along with the routing information in primary routing information 904 is then compared with the profile database 1308 to determine if a profile associated therewith is available. This information is stored in a transaction database 1310 such that, at a later time, for each routing code received in the form of the information in primary routing information 904, there will be associated therewith the IDs 1304 of each of the PCS 906. The associated profiles in database 1308, which are stored in association with IDs 1304, can then be assembled and transmitted to a subscriber as referenced by a subscriber node 1312 on the network 910. The ARS 308 can do this in two modes, a realtime mode or a non-realtime mode. In a realtime mode, each time a PC 906 accesses the advertiser database 310, that user's profile information is uploaded to the subscriber node 1312. At the same time, billing information is generated for that subscriber 1312 which is stored in a billing database 1316. Therefore, the ARS 308 has the ability to inform the subscriber 1312 of each transaction, bill for those transactions, and also provide to the subscriber 1312 profile information regarding who is accessing the particular product advertisement having associated therewith the routing information field 904 for a particular routing code as described hereinabove. This information, once assembled, can then be transmitted to the subscriber 1312 and also be reflected in billing information and stored in the billing information database 1316.

Referring now to FIG. 14, there is illustrated a flowchart depicting the operation for storing the profile for the user. The program is initiated in a block 1402 and then proceeds to a function block 1404, wherein the system will prompt for the profile upon initiation of the system. This initiation is a function that is set to activate whenever the user initially loads the software that he or she is provided. The purpose for this is to create, in addition to the setup information, a user profile. Once the user is prompted for this, then the program will flow to a decision block 1406 to determine whether the user provides basic or detailed information. This is selectable by the user. If selecting basic, the program will flow to a function block 1408 wherein the user will enter basic information such as name and serial number and possibly an address. However, to provide some incentive to the user to enter more information, the original prompt in function block 1404 would have offers for such things as coupons, discounts, etc., if the user will enter additional information. If the user selects this option, the program flows from the decision block 1406 to a function block 1410. In the function block 1410, the user is prompted to enter specific information such as job, income level, general family history,

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demographic information and more. There can be any amount of information collected in this particular function block.

Once all of the information is collected, in either the basic mode or the more specific mode, the program will then flow to a function block **1412** where this information is stored locally. The program then flows to a decision block **1414** to then go on-line to the host or the ARS **308**. In general, the user is prompted to determine whether he or she wants to send this information to the host at the present time or to send it later. If he or she selects the "later" option, the program will flow to a function block **1415** to prompt the user at a later time to send the information. In the disclosed embodiment, the user will not be able to utilize the software until the profile information is sent to the host. Therefore, the user may have to activate this at a later time in order to connect with the host.

If the user has selected the option to upload the profile information to the host, the program will flow to the function block **1416** to initiate the connect process and then to a decision block **1418** to determine if the connection has been made. If not, the program will flow along a "N" path to a time to decision block **1420** which will timeout to an error block **1422** or back to the input of the connect decision block **1418**. The program, once connected, will then flow along a "Y" path from decision block **1418** to a function block **1428** to send the profile information with the ID of the computer or user to the host. The ID is basically, as described hereinabove, a "cookie" in the computer which is accessed by the program when transmitting to the host. The program will then flow to a function block **1430** to activate the program such that it, at later time, can operate without requiring all of the setup information. In general, all of the operation of this flowchart is performed with a "wizard" which steps the user through the setup process. Once complete, the program will flow to a Done block **1432**.

Referring now to FIG. 15, there is illustrated a flowchart depicting the operation of the host when receiving a transaction. The program is initiated at a Start block **1502** and then proceeds to decision block **1504**, wherein it is determined whether the system has received a routing request, i.e., the routing information **904** in the form of a tone, etc., embedded in the audio signal, as described hereinabove with respect to FIG. 9. The program will loop back around to the input of decision block **1504** until the routing request has been received. At this time, the program will flow along the "Y" path to a function block **1506** to receive the primary routing information and the user ID. Essentially, this primary routing information is extracted from the audio tone, in addition to the user ID. The program then flows to a function block **1508** to look up the manufacturer URL that corresponds to the received primary routing information and then return the necessary command information to the originating PC **108** in order to allow that PC **108** to connect to the destination associated with the primary routing information. Thereafter, the program will flow to a function block **1510** to update the transaction database **1310** for the current transaction. In general, the routing information **904** will be stored as a single field with the associated IDs. The profile database **1308**, as described hereinabove, has associated therewith detailed profiles of each user on the system that has activated their software in association with their ID. Since the ID was sent in association with the routing information, what is stored in the transaction database **1310** is the routing code, in association with all of the IDs transmitted to the system in association with that particular routing code. Once this transaction database **1310** has been

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updated, as described hereinabove, the transactions can be transferred back to the subscriber at node **312** with the detailed profile information from the profile database **1308**.

The profile information can be transmitted back to the subscriber or manufacturer at the node **312** in realtime or non-realtime. A decision block **1512** is provided for this, which determines if the delivery is realtime. If realtime, the program will flow along a "Y" path to a function block **1514** wherein the information will be immediately forwarded to the manufacturer or subscriber. The program will then flow to a function block **1516** wherein the billing for that particular manufacturer or subscriber will be updated in the billing database **1316**. The program will then flow into an End block **1518**. If it was non-realtime, the program moves along the "N" path to a function block **1520** wherein it is set for a later delivery and it is accrued in the transaction database **1310**. In any event, the transaction database **1310** will accrue all information associated with a particular routing code.

With a realtime transaction, it is possible for a manufacturer to place an advertisement in a magazine or to place a product on a shelf at a particular time. The manufacturer can thereafter monitor the times when either the advertisements are or the products are purchased. Of course, they must be scanned into a computer which will provide some delay. However, the manufacturer can gain a very current view of how a product is moving. For example, if a cola manufacturer were to provide a promotional advertisement on, for example, television, indicating that a new cola was going to be placed on the shelf and that the first 1000 purchasers, for example, scanning their code into the network would receive some benefit, such as a chance to win a trip to some famous resort in Florida or some other incentive, the manufacturer would have a very good idea as to how well the advertisement was received. Further, the advertiser would know where the receptive markets were. If this advertiser, for example, had placed the television advertisement in ten cities and received overwhelming response from one city, but very poor response from another city, he would then have some inclination to believe that either the one poor-response city was not a good market or that the advertising medium he had chosen was very poor. Since the advertiser can obtain a relatively instant response and also content with that response as to the demographics of the responder, very important information can be obtained in a relatively short time.

It should be noted that the disclosed embodiment is not limited to a single source PC **302**, but may encompass a large number of source computers connected over a global communication network. Additionally, the embodiment is not limited to a single ARS **308** or a single advertiser server **312**, but may include a plurality of ARS and advertiser systems, indicated by the addition of ARS **314** and advertiser server **A 316**, respectively. It should also be noted that this embodiment is not limited only to global communication networks, but also may be used with LAN, WAN, and peer-to-peer configurations.

It should also be noted that the disclosed embodiment is not limited to a personal computer, but is also applicable to, for example, a Network Computer ("NetPC"), a scaled-down version of the PC, or any system which accommodates user interaction and interfaces to information resources.

One typical application of the above noted technique is for providing a triggering event during a program, such as a sport event. In a first example, this may be generated by an advertiser. One could imagine that, due to the cost of advertisements in a high profile sports program, there is a

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desire to utilize this time wisely. If, for example, an advertiser contracted for 15 seconds worth of advertising time, they could insert within their program a tone containing the routing information. This routing information can then be output to the user's PC 302 which will cause the user's PC 302 to, via the network, obtain information from a remote location typically controlled by the advertiser. This could be in the form of an advertisement of a length longer than that contracted for. Further, this could be an interactive type of advertisement. An important aspect to the type of interaction between the actual broadcast program with the embedded routing information and the manufacturer's site is the fact that there is provided information as to the user's PC 302 and a profile of the user themselves. Therefore, an advertiser can actually gain realtime information as to the number of individuals that are watching their particular advertisement and also information as to the background of those individuals, profile information, etc. This can be a very valuable asset to an advertiser.

In another example, the producer of the program, whether it be an on-air program, a program embedded in a video tape, CD-ROM, DVD, or a cassette, can allow the user to automatically access additional information that is not displayed on the screen. For example, in a sporting event, various statistics can be provided to the user from a remote location, merely by the viewer watching the program. When these statistics are provided, the advertiser can be provided with profile information and background information regarding the user. This can be important when, for example, the user may record a sports program. If the manufacturer sees that this program routing code is being output from some device at a time later than the actual broadcast itself, this allows the advertisers to actually see that their program is still being used and also what type of individual is using it. Alternatively, the broadcaster could determine the same and actually bill the advertiser an additional sum for a later broadcast. This is all due to the fact that the routing information automatically, through a PC and a network, will provide an indication to the advertiser the time at which the actual information was broadcast.

The different type of medium that can be utilized with the above embodiment are such things as advertisements, which are discussed hereinabove, contests, games, news programs, education, coupon promotional programs, demonstration media (demos), and photographs, all of which can be broadcast on a private site or a public site. This all will provide the ability to allow realtime interface with the network and the remote location for obtaining the routed information and also allow for realtime billing and accounting.

Referring now to FIG. 16, there is illustrated a general block diagram of a disclosed embodiment. A bar code scanning input device 1600 is provided by a input device distributor to customers and is associated with that distributor via a input device ID stored therein. The input device 1600 is either sold or freely distributed to customers for use with their personal computing systems. Since more and more products are being sold using bar codes, it can be appreciated that a user having the input device 1600 can scan bar codes of a multitude of products in order to obtain more information. Information about these products can be made immediately available to the user from the manufacturer for presentation by the user's computer 302. Beyond simply displaying information about the product in which the user is interested, the input device distributor may include additional advertising information for display to the user such as information about other promotions or products provided or

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sold by the input device distributor. Similarly, advertisers may provide catalogs of advertisements or information in newspapers or periodicals where the user simply scans the bar code associated with the advertisement using the input device 1600 to obtain further information. There is provided a paper source 1602 having contained thereon an advertisement 1604 and an associated bar code 1606. (Note that the disclosed concept is not limited to scanning of bar codes 1606 from paper sources 1602, but is also operable to scan a bar code 1606 on the product itself. Also, the input device 1600 can be any type of device that will scan any type of image having information encoded therein.)

After obtaining the input device 1600 from the input device distributor, the user connects the input device 1600 to their PC 302. During a scanning operation, input device 1600 reads bar code data 1606 and the input device ID into a "wedge" interface 1608 for conversion into keyboard data, which keyboard data is passed therefrom into the keyboard input port of PC 302. The importance of the input device ID will be discussed in more detail hereinbelow.

The wedge interface 1608 is simply an interface box containing circuitry that accommodates inputs from both the scanning input device 1600 and a computer keyboard 1610. This merely allows the information scanned by the input device 1600 to be input into the PC 302. In the disclosed embodiment, the wedge interface 1608 will convert any information. The data output from the input device 1600 is passed into the wedge interface 1608 for conversion into keyboard data which is readily recognizable by the PC 302. Therefore, the input device 1600 is not required to be connected to a separate port on the PC 302. This data is recognized as a sequence of keystrokes. However, the output of the input device 1600 can be input in any manner compatible with the PC 302. When not receiving scanner data, the wedge interface 1608 simply acts as a pass-through device for keyboard data from the keyboard 1610. In any case, the information is ultimately processed by a processor in the PC 302 and can be presented to the user on a display 1612. The wedge interface 1608 is operable to provide a decoding function for the bar code 1606 and conversion thereof to keystroke input data.

In operation, the product code of a product is provided in the form of a bar code 1606. This bar code 1606 is the "link" to a product. The disclosed embodiment is operable to connect that product information contained in the bar code 1606 with a web page of the manufacturer of that product by utilizing the bar code 1606 as the product "identifier." The program operating on the PC 302 provides routing information to the ARS 308 after launching the browser on the PC 302 and connecting to the ARS 308 over the GCN 306, which ARS 308 then performs the necessary steps to cause the browser to connect to the manufacturer web site, while also providing for an accounting step, as will be described in more detail hereinbelow.

The bar code 1606 by itself is incompatible with any kind of network for the purposes of communication therewith. It is primarily provided for a retail-type setting. Therefore, the information contained in the bar code 1606, by itself, does not allow for anything other than identification of a product, assuming that one has a database 1614 containing information as to a correlation between the product and the bar code 1606.

The wedge interface 1608 is operable to decode the bar code 1606 to extract the encoded information therein, and append to that decoded bar code information relating to an ID for the input device 1600. This information is then forwarded to the ARS 308 by the resident program in the PC

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302. This is facilitated by intermediate routing information stored in the program indicating to which node on the GCN 306 the scanned bar code information is to be sent, i.e., to the ARS 308. It is important to note that the information in the bar code 1606 must be converted from its optical image to numerical values which are then ultimately input to the keyboard input port of PC 302 and converted into data compatible with communication software residing on the PC 302 (in this case, HTML language for insertion into a browser program). When the scanned information is input to the PC 302, the resident program launches the browser program and then assembles a communication packet comprised of the URL of the ARS 308, the input device ID and the user ID. If another type of communications program were utilized, then it would have to be converted into language compatible with that program. Of course, a user could actually key in the information on the bar code 102 and then append the appropriate intermediate routing information thereafter. As will be described hereinbelow, the intermediate routing information appended thereto is the URL of the ARS 308 disposed on the GCN 306.

As part of the configuration for using the input device 1600, the PC 302 hosts input device software which is operable to interpret data transmitted from the input device 1600, and to create a message packet having the scanned product information and input device ID, routing information, and a user ID which identifies the user location of the input device 1600. The input device software loads at boot-up of the PC 302 and runs in the background. In response to receiving a scanned bar code 1606, the wedge interface 1608 outputs a keystroke code (e.g., ALT-F10) to bring the input device program into the foreground for interaction by the operating system. The input device program then inserts the necessary information into the browser program. The message packet is then transmitted to interface 304 across the global communication network 306 to the ARS 308. The ARS 308 interrogates the message packet and performs a lookup function using the ARS database 310. If a match is found between particular parameters of the message packet, a return message packet is sent back to the PC 302 for processing.

The input device program running on PC 302 functions to partition the browser window displayed to the user into several individual areas. This is for the purpose of preparing to present to the user selected information in each of the individual areas (also called "framing"). The selected information comprises the product information which the user requested by scanning the bar code 1606 using the input device 1600, information about the input device distributor which establishes the identity of the company associated with that particular input device 1600, and at least one or more other frames which may be advertisements related to other products that the input device distributor sells. Note that the advertisements displayed by the input device distributor may be related to the product of interest or totally unrelated. For example, if a user scans the bar code 1606 of a soda from Company A, the input device distributor may generate an advertisement of a new soft drink being marketed by Company A, that it sells. On the other hand, the input device distributor may also structure the display of information to the user such that a user requesting product information of a Product X may get the requested information of Product X along with advertisements for a competing item Product Y. Essentially, the input device distributor is free to generate any advertisement to the user in response to the user requesting product information.

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The return message packet transmitted from the ARS 308 to the PC 302 is then transmitted back across the GCN 306 to the advertiser server 312. The advertiser server 312 restructures the message packet and appends the particular product information for transmission back to the PC 302. Upon receiving the particular advertiser information from advertiser server 312, the PC 302 then retransmits a message to the input device distributor site 1616 and E-commerce site 1618 to obtain the information that needs to be framed in the browser window displayed to the user.

Therefore, the input device 1600 is associated with the input device distributor by way of an input device ID such that scanning a product bar code 1606 in order to obtain information about that particular product generates one or more responses from one or more remote sites disposed on the GCN 306. Stored in the input device 1600 is the input device ID which establishes its relationship to the input device distributor. Proprietary input device software running on the PC 302 operates to decode scanned bar code information and the input device ID received from the input device 1600 and wedge interface 1608, and also provides a unique user ID for establishing the location of the user of the input device 1600. The input device software also assembles message packets and works in conjunction with the on-board communication software (e.g., a browser) to automatically route the message packets across the GCN 306 such that the one or more remote sites disposed on the GCN 306 return information to be framed for presentation to the user.

Referring now to FIG. 17, there is illustrated a conversion circuit of the wedge interface. A microcontroller 1700 provides conversion of the data from the input device 1600 and controls interfacing of the keyboard 1610 and input device 1600 with the PC 302. The microcontroller 1700 has contained therein a memory 1702 or it can have external memory. There are provided a plurality of input device interfaces 1704 to the input device 1600, a plurality of PC interfaces 1706 to the PC 302, and plurality of keyboard interfaces 1708 to the keyboard 1610. In general, the input device interfaces 1704 comprise a serial data line, a ground line, and a power line. Similarly, the keyboard interfaces 1708 comprise a serial data line, a ground line, a clock line, and a power line. The PC 302 provides a clock line, a power line, a serial data, and a ground line for input to the microcontroller 1700. The microcontroller 1700 is operable to receive signals from the keyboard 1610 and transfer the signals to the PC 302 as keyboard signals. Operation with the keyboard 1610 is essentially a "pass-through" procedure. Data output from the keyboard 1610 is already in keyboard format, and therefore requires no conversion by the wedge interface 1608. With respect to the input device 1600, the serial data is not compatible with a keyboard 1610 and, therefore, it must be converted into a keyboard format in order to allow input thereof to the keyboard input of the PC 302.

The microcontroller 1700 performs this function after decoding this bar code information, and conversion of this bar code information into an appropriate stream of data which is comprised of the bar code information and the appended URL. This appended URL will be pre-stored in the memory 1702 and is programmable at the time of manufacture. It is noted that the memory 1702 is illustrated as being contained within the microcontroller 1702 to provide a single chip solution. However, this could be external memory that is accessible by the microcontroller 1702. Therefore, the microcontroller 1700 provides an interface between the input device 1600 and the keyboard 1610 to the PC 302 which allows the input device 1600 to receive coded

information and convert it to keyboard strokes or, alternatively, to merely pass-through the keystrokes from the keyboard **1610**. Therefore, the user need not install any type of plug-in circuit board into the motherboard of the PC **302** in order to provide an interface to the input device **1600**; rather, the user need only utilize the already available keyboard port in order to input the appropriate data into the system.

In this particular disclosed embodiment, the microcontroller **1700** comprises a PIC16C73 microcontroller by Microchip Technologies™. The PIC16C73 device is a low cost CMOS 8-bit microcontroller with an integrated analog-to-digital converter. The PIC16C73 device, as illustrated in the disclosed embodiment, has 192 bytes of RAM and 4k×4 of EPROM memory. The microcontroller **1700** can accommodate asynchronous or synchronous inputs from input devices connected to it. In this disclosed embodiment, communication to the keyboard **1610** is synchronous while it is asynchronous when communicating with input device **1600**.

It should be noted that, although in this particular embodiment bar code information of the bar code **1606** is input into the keyboard input port of the PC **302**, disclosed methods may also be advantageously utilized with high speed port architectures such as Universal Serial Bus ("USB") and IEEE 1394.

Bar codes are structured to be read in either direction. Timing considerations need to be addressed because of the variety of individuals scanning the bar code introduce a wide variety of scan rates. Bar codes use bars of varying widths. The presence of a black bar generates a positive pulse, and the absence of a black bar generates no pulse. Each character of a conventional bar code has associated therewith seven pulses or bars. Depending on the width of the bars, the time between pulses varies. In this disclosed embodiment, the interface circuitry **1608** performs a "running" calculation of the scan time based upon the rising edge of the pulses commencing with the leader or header information. The minimum and maximum scans times are calculated continuously in software with the interface **1608** during the scanning process to ensure a successful scan by the user.

Referring now to FIG. **18**, there is illustrated a sample message packet transmitted from the user's PC **302** to the ARS **308**. The message packet **1800** comprises a number of bits of information including the bar code information **1802** obtained from the user scanning the bar code **1606** with the input device **1600**; the input device ID **1804** which is embedded in a memory in the input device **1600** and identifies it with a particular input device distributor; and a user ID **1806** which is derived from the software running on the PC **302** and which identifies uniquely with the user location. Note that the message packet includes other necessary information for the proper transmission for point to point.

Referring now to FIG. **19**, there is illustrated a more detailed block diagram of the routing of the message packets in order to present the framed information to the user. As is mentioned hereinabove, when the user scans a bar code **1606** using the input device **1600**, a input device program running on the user PC **302** is operable to interpret the information output by the input device **1600** and generate a message packet for transmission over the GCN **306**. The input device program assembles the message packet such that it is directed to the ARS **308** disposed on the GCN **306**. The message packet contains several pieces of information including the input device ID **1804** which links it to the input device distributor, the user ID **1806** which identifies the

particular user using the input device **1600**, and bar code information **1802** describing a particular product of interest to the user. This message from the PC **302** is transmitted over a path **1900** to the ARS **308** where the ARS database **310** is accessed to cross reference the ID information **1804** and bar code information **1802** to a particular advertiser and input device distributor. The ARS **308** returns a message packet over a path **1902** to the user PC **302** which contains routing information as to the location of various other sites disposed on the GCN **306**, for example, the advertiser server **312** and input device distributor site **1616**.

It can be appreciated that other information can also be provided by the ARS **308** which more closely targets the particular user of the input device **1600**. For example, if it is known that a particular input device **1600** is sold in a certain geographic area, this information can be useful in targeting the particular user with certain advertising information relevant to that geographic area. In any case, the information returned from the ARS **308** over path **1902** provides enough information for the input device program running on the user PC **302** to identify a number of other sites disposed on the GCN **306**. The user PC **302** then processes the return message packet and routes another message packet over a path **1904** to the advertiser server **312**. The advertiser server **312** then returns product information of the particular product in which the user was interested back to the user PC **302** over a path **1906**. Similarly, the user PC **302** routes information (e.g., the URL of the input device distributor site and the user profile) to the input device distributor site **1616** over a path **1908** in order to obtain information back over a path **1910** for framing any banners which identify the input device distributor. Additionally, the user PC **302** forwards a message packet to the E-commerce site **1618** over a path **1912** in order to return information regarding any particular advertisements the input device distributor wants to display to the user. The advertisements are returned to the PC **302** over a path **1914**.

Referring now to FIG. **20**, there is illustrated a block diagram of a browser window according to the disclosed embodiment. The browser window **2000** is partitioned into a plurality of areas for framing specific information. A bar code area **2002** displays that product information in which the user was interested; an input device-specific area **2004** displays information about the input device distributor; and an E-commerce area **2006** displays advertising information that the input device distributor selects for display according to this particular user and input device **1600**. As mentioned hereinabove, a program operable to process scanned bar code information with the unique input device **1600** develops the browser window by partitioning it into specific areas for the framing of information. Therefore, information returned from the E-commerce site **1608** is passed through the GCN **306** to the particular E-commerce frame **2006**. Similarly, information about the particular product of interest is returned from the advertiser site **312** across the GCN **306** to the particular bar code specific area **2002**. Information placed in the input device specific area **2004** is information about the input device distributor which is returned from the input device distributor site **1616** across GCN **306**.

Referring now to FIG. **21**, there is illustrated a structure of information contained in the ARS database. The ARS database **310** contains a variety of information required to properly interrogate and assemble packets for obtaining information from the various sites disposed on the GCN **306**. The ARS database **310** has a database structure **2100** which contains addresses for the web sites containing the product information requested by the user when scanning the bar

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code **1606** with the input device **1600**. Under a PRODUCT heading **2102** are listed the particular bar codes and associated routing information for addressing the respective server location. For example, the ARS server **308** may contain any number of advertisers having unique URL addresses associated therewith. Therefore, the bar code **1606** of a particular product is associated with a unique URL address which routes any request for information of that product to that particular advertiser's site. Also part of the ARS database structure **2000** is a heading of INPUT DEVICE under which is the input device ID **1804** and the distributor associated with that input device ID **1804**.

It can be appreciated that there may be a number of distributors using the disclosed architecture such that each distributor has an ID embedded in the input device **1600** which uniquely identifies that input device with the particular distributor. Therefore, the unique input device ID **1804** needs to be listed with the respective distributors of that input device **1600** in order to process the information that needs to be framed and displayed to that particular user. Another heading under the ARS database structure **2100** is a user heading **2106** which contains profile information associated with that particular user ID **1806**. As mentioned hereinabove, the user ID **1806** is obtained via the input device software running on the PC **302** and upon installation or subsequent configuration may request that the user input certain profile information which may be used to target that particular user with products and services which identify with that user profile. The ARS database structure **2100** also contains an E-commerce heading **2108** which contains information related to the bar code **1606** and an advertisement that may be triggered by the request for that information. For example, any bar code **1606** associated with a paper source **1602** can be associated with the specific information in the ARS database **310**. A user wishing to obtain information about a specific soft drink may, in fact, trigger an advertising response of a competitor product. Similarly, the user interested in information about that particular soft drink may also trigger information which is relevant to that particular product or a product which may normally be served in conjunction with that soft drink. Furthermore, if the user profile indicates that this individual has significant interest in finance or insurance, the request for information regarding this particular bar coded product may trigger advertisement from an E-commerce server **1618** related to information about finance and insurance. It should be noted that the information described as contained within the ARS database structure **2100** is not limited to what has been described, but may comprise any number of pieces of information used to present desired information to the computer display of the user.

Referring now to FIG. **22**, there is illustrated a flowchart of the process of receiving information from the user's perspective, and according to the disclosed embodiment. The input device software running on the user's PC **302** runs in the background until activated by output from the input device **1600**. Therefore, flow moves to a decision block **2200** where if a scanned input does not occur, flow moves out the "N" path and loops back to the input of decision block **2200**. On the other hand, if scanned input information is received, flow moves out the "Y" path to a function block **2202** where the input device software assembles a message packet containing the bar code information, the input device ID **1804** and the ARS **308** URL address. Additionally, the browser is launched in which this information is placed for transmission to the ARS **308**. Flow then moves to a function block **2204** where the browser is partitioned into any number

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of areas in which information is displayed when obtained from the input device distributor site **1616**, the E-commerce site **1618**, and the advertiser server **312**. It should be known that although three frames are shown in the particular window **2000** of this embodiment, the number of frames displayed in the window **2000** is limited only by the available real estate of the window **2000** area itself.

After the input device software partitions the browser window into one or more frames in preparation of receipt of return information, flow moves to a decision block **2206** where the computer waits for information to be returned from the various sites disposed on the GCN **306**. If information is not returned, flow moves out the "N" path and simply loops back to the input to continue monitoring for receipt of the information. If information has been received, flow moves out the "Y" path to a function block **2208** where routing information for each frame (or partitioned area of the window **2000**) is inserted into one or more packets for transmission to the various sites. The various sites then return the requested information back to the PC **302**, as indicated in function block **2210**. Flow is then to a function block **2212** where the proprietary software working in conjunction with the hosted browser places the returned information into the respective frames of the window. The user, viewing the display at PC **302**, then perceives a variety of information, one of which is the particular product information which he or she requested, in addition to input device distributor information, and possibly other advertisements based upon the user's profile.

Referring now to FIG. **23**, there is illustrated a flowchart of the process according to the ARS. The ARS **308** is operable to decode and process messages received from the GCN **306**. Therefore, flow is to a decision block **2300** where, if bar code information is not received, flow is out the "N" path with loop-back to its input. If bar code information has been received, flow is to a function block **2302** where a matching process occurs to link the bar-coded product information to its respective manufacturer. The ARS database **310** also associates the URL address of the manufacturer's server. When a match is found, the ARS **308** begins to assemble a message packet of information for transmission back to the PC **302**, as indicated in function block **2304**. The message packet contains the product information and the URL address of the manufacturer's website. Flow then moves to a decision block **2306** where the input device ID **1804** is compared with the list of input device IDs issued by the particular input device distributor. If the input device ID **1804** is validated, flow moves out the "Y" path to a function block **2308** where the message packet is appended with the input device ID **1804** and distributor routing address. Flow then moves to a decision block **2310** where the ARS **308** determines if any E-commerce information is to be associated with a particular input device ID **1804**. If so, flow is out the "Y" path to a function block **2312** where the message packet is appended with the E-commerce routing string. The E-commerce routing string provides addressing for the E-commerce server **1618**. Flow then moves to a function block **2314** where all message packets are returned back to the PC **302** for processing.

Referring back to decision block **2306**, if the input device ID **1804** is determined to be invalid, flow moves out the "N" path and jumps forward to the input of decision block **2314**, since the lack of a input device ID **1804** interrupts the link to any advertising provided by the E-commerce server **1618**. At this point, the only information provided is the link to the advertiser server **312** for return of product information. Referring now to decision block **2310**, if no E-commerce

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information is available, flow moves out the "N" path and jumps forward to the input of function block 2314 where the message packet back to the PC 302 contains only the URL of the advertiser server 312, the bar code information, the distributor server 1616 address and input device ID 1804 information.

Referring now to FIG. 24, there is illustrated a flowchart of the process performed at the E-commerce site. The E-commerce server 1618 receives the message packet from the user PC 302, as indicated in function block 2400, and decodes the packet to perform a match with the bar coded information. Moving on to a decision block 2402, if the match is unsuccessful, flow is out the "N" path to a function block 2404 where the match is rejected. A message may be returned to indicate that a problem occurred and the user may need to re-scan the product bar code 1606. If a successful match occurs, flow moves out the "Y" path to a function block 2406 where the input device ID 1804 is matched with the bar code product information. The bar coded information may be distributed to customers over a large geographic area. However, the input device 1606 may be coded for certain geographic areas. For example, an input device 1600 having an XXX ID may be restricted for sale in the Southwestern United States while a input device 1600 having a YYY ID may be sold only in the Northeast. In this way, geographic areas may be targeted with advertising more appealing to that particular area. Advertising returned to the user PC 302 may be focused further by obtaining a user profile when the software or input device 1600 are installed. In this way, advertising may be focused based upon the user profile. Therefore, flow moves to a function block 2408 to lookup the E-commerce action based upon the input device ID 1804 and the bar code information. Flow moves to a function block 2410 to assemble all the information into a packet for return to the user PC 302. The product information and/or user profile information may be returned. Flow is then to a function block 2412 where the message packet is transmitted.

Although it has heretofore been typical for users accessing computer networks such as the Internet to use personal computers (PCS) having a hard-wired network connection, an ever increasing number of users are connecting with various types of wireless devices. Such wireless devices include handheld computers (also known as personal digital assistants ("PDAs")) having integrated wireless Internet access, e.g., the Palm VIX produced by Palm Inc., cellular telephones having integrated Internet access capabilities, e.g., telephones conforming to the Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) established by the Wireless Application Protocol Forum Ltd., two-way digital pagers and other commercially available devices. All of these wireless devices includes a processor and a transmitter/receiver for sending and receiving radio frequency (RF) signals to provide two-way digital communication between the device's processor and a computer network. Of course, numerous additional components, e.g., memories, displays and input devices, are present in these wireless devices, their specific nature depending upon the type of device and desired features. The general construction of such wireless devices is, however, conventional and thus will not be described in detail.

Referring now to FIG. 25, there is illustrated a diagrammatic view of one embodiment of a system for connecting a wireless device to a remote location on a computer network. The system includes a beacon unit 2502 disposed at a geographic location 2504 and transmitting a beacon signal (denoted by arrow 2506) into a target region adjacent

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to the beacon location. The system also includes a beacon signal receiver circuit (hereafter "BSRC") 2508 disposed with a wireless device 2510 and operably connected to the processor of the wireless device. Upon receiving the beacon signal 2506, the BSRC 2508 sends control signals to the processor of the wireless device 2510. The processor of the wireless device 2510, in response to receiving these control signals, instructs the wireless device to connect to a specific remote location on a computer network. This connection can be completely automatic or it can be made at the option of the user, but in any case it obviates the need for the user to manually input a network address for the remote location.

In the embodiment illustrated, the beacon unit 2502 is mounted on an outdoor advertising structure (i.e., a billboard) 2522 located adjacent to a roadway 2514. The wireless device 2510 is disposed within an automobile 2512 traveling along the roadway 2514. As previously described, the wireless device 2510 includes a processor and a transmitter/receiver for sending and receiving RF signals (denoted by arrows 2516). The RF signals 2516 provide two-way digital communications with a computer network, in this case GCN 306, which may be the Internet. The RF signals 2516 allow communication between the processor of the wireless device 2510 and the computer network 306 through a wireless network interface 2518, which in this case also serves as an Internet service provider (ISP). For purposes of illustration, the network interface 2518 in FIG. 25 shows only one antenna 2520; however, it will be appreciated that the typical wireless network interface comprises a plurality of antennas 2520 and associated radio equipment (not shown) which are distributed across the service area (e.g., in cells) and operably interconnected allowing the wireless device 2510 to maintain virtually unbroken communications with the network 306 as it moves within the service area. It is noted that these wireless devices operate on a delay, such that a request for information may be buffered at the wireless device 2510 in the event of a communication interruption. When communications are resumed, then the request is sent. In the same way, reply information is buffered, such that there may be a delay in returning the information. This is easily facilitated at the ISP 2518, due to the nature of the packet nature of the information transferred. For example, a packet of request information may be buffered at the wireless device 2510 until communication is resumed, and then transmitted to the ISP 2518. Upon receipt, the ISP 2518 acknowledges to the wireless device 2510 that the information has been received. The ISP 2518 then handles the request outside of the wireless connection over link 2520. When connection is established with the advertiser server 312 and information retrieved, this information is buffered at the ISP 2518 and delivered to the wireless device 2510 when communications permit. Since the primary communication protocol is packet-based in nature, this type of buffering is easily facilitated.

Referring now to FIG. 26, there is illustrated a diagrammatic view of the beacon unit 2502 of this embodiment. The beacon unit 2502 includes a transmitter 2602, a modulator 2604 operably connected to the transmitter, and a processor 2606 which is operably connected to the modulator. The transmitter 2602 transmits the beacon signal 2506 into the target region. The information content (i.e., modulation) of the beacon signal 2506 is supplied to the transmitter 2602 by the modulator unit 2604, which in turn receives the content from the processor 2606. The beacon signal 2506 may be modulated to carry information content in either digital or analog form. In the illustrated embodiment, the transmitter

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2602 is a radio frequency (RF) unit for transmitting an RF beacon signal **2506**. An antenna **2608** is operably connected to the transmitter **2602** to provide desired signal radiation strength and directional properties, thereby controlling the size and shape of the target region. Using an omnidirectional antenna **2608** will result in a generally circular target region which surrounds the location of the beacon unit **2502**. Using a directional antenna **2608** will result in a narrower, more focused target region, typically to one side of the beacon unit **2502**. It will be appreciated that the frequency of the RF beacon signal **2506** will be different from the frequency used by the wireless device **2510** for network communication signals **2516**, thereby allowing the signals to operate simultaneously without causing interference.

While the illustrated embodiment uses an RF transmitter **2602** for producing an RF beacon signal **2506**, it will be readily apparent that other types of transmitters may be used in alternative embodiments to produce beacon signals having different characteristics. For example, the beacon unit may have an optical transmitter for transmitting an optical beacon signal. An optical beacon signal **2506** may have a carrier wavelength in the visible light portion, the infrared (IR) portion, or the ultraviolet (UV) portion of the electromagnetic spectrum. Such optical beacon signals may be produced using either non-coherent or coherent (e.g., laser) light sources. Optical beacon signals **2506** will typically require a line-of-sight path between the beacon **2502** and the BSRC **2508**, however, this may be desirable for certain applications. Further, it avoids RF interference and licensing problems. In yet other embodiments, the beacon unit **2502** may have an acoustic transmitter for transmitting an acoustic beacon signal. The acoustic beacon signal **2506** may have a carrier wavelength in the human-perceptible frequency range or within the ultrasonic frequency range. Acoustic beacon signals **2506** will typically be of short range, but a line-of-sight path is not required.

In the embodiment shown in FIG. 26, an electronic memory device **2610** is operably connected to the processor **2606**. This could be conventional DRAM, flash DRAM or SRAM. Magnetic storage could also be utilized. The memory device **2610** includes one or more memory locations which store data, also known as "codes," that can be retrieved by the processor **2606**. The processor **2606** sends signals indicative of the retrieved codes to the modulator **2604** for incorporated as a component of the beacon signal **2506** transmitted by the transmitter **2602**.

In the illustrated embodiment, two memory locations are provided in the memory device **2610**, a first memory location **2612** and a second memory location **2614**. Each memory location contains a different code. For example, the first code (denoted "MSG. CODE") in the first memory location **2612** may be associated with a specific remote location on the network **306** to facilitate the connection of the wireless device receiving the code to that specific remote location. However, this association may have one of several forms. In one embodiment, the first code **2612** actually includes routing information (e.g., a URL or other network address) associated with a specific remote location on the network. In other words, the routing information is actually "embedded" or "encoded" in the first code **2612**. In an alternative embodiment, the first code **2612** does not actually include routing information to the remote location, but rather is associated with the remote location by other means. This may be by association of the first code **2612** and the remote location in a secondary database such as the advertiser server **312** as further-described below.

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The second code (denoted in this example by "LOC. ID") in the second memory location **2614** is also transmitted by the transmitter **2602** as a component of the beacon signal **2506**. The second code may be associated with an attribute of the beacon unit **2502**. Examples of such attributes are the geographic location (i.e., LOC ID) of the beacon unit, a serial number of the beacon unit and/or a type descriptor characterizing the type of beacon unit. Each of these attributes can be used to facilitate the connection of the wireless device **2510** receiving the code to the most appropriate specific remote location on the network **306**. In some embodiments, the selection of remote location for connection of the wireless device **2510** may be made by considering both the first code **2612** and the second code **2614**. Thus, for example, if the first code "MSG CODE" was associated with a particular restaurant chain (e.g., "Burger X"), and the second code "LOC. ID" was associated with the geographic location of the beacon unit, then the invention could be used to connect the wireless device **2510** to a remote location on the network **306** having information as to the geographic location of the nearest Burger X restaurant (relative to the beacon unit location). Alternately, where the selection of remote location is controlled only by the first code, then the second code can be used to collect information regarding the source of the connection, e.g., to determine the "ratings" (i.e., advertising effectiveness) of a particular beacon unit **2502**.

It will be apparent that the association between the second code and the beacon unit attribute may have one of several forms, similar to those previously described for the first code. Thus, the second code may actually include the attribute, e.g., location, serial number or type descriptor, of the beacon unit embedded therewithin. Alternatively, the second code may be associated with the beacon unit attribute in a secondary database such as the ARS **308**. Further, it will be apparent that some embodiments may include only one code, in which case the first code may be associated with any of the beacon unit attributes (e.g., location, serial number or type descriptor) as previously discussed.

An input/output ("I/O") interface circuit **2616** may be included in the beacon unit **2502** to allow the memory unit **2610** to be reprogrammed with new codes. The I/O circuit **2616** is operably connected between the processor **2606** and an external instruction source **2618**. The I/O circuit **2616** is thus operably connected to the memory unit **2610**. Specifically, the I/O circuit **2616** receives instruction signals (denoted by reference number **2620**) from the external instruction source **2618** and transforms them into system instruction signals (denoted by reference number **2622**) usable by the processor **2606**. In response to receipt of the system instruction signals **2622**, the processor **2606** accesses the memory unit **2610** and changes the codes in memory locations, e.g., locations **2612** and **2614**. In this way, the beacon unit **2502** can be updated to change the remote location to which it directs nearby wireless devices. It will be apparent that a variety of external instruction sources may be utilized. In the illustrated embodiment, the instruction source **2618** is a public switched telephone network ("PSTN") connected to the beacon unit **2502** by telephone lines **2524** (see FIG. 25). In such a case, the I/O circuit **2616** will include a telephone modem circuit allowing the beacon unit **2502** to be updated from a remote location. In another embodiment, the instruction source **2618** may be a keypad or keyboard attached directly to the I/O circuit **2616**. In this case, no telephone lines are required, however, service personnel would need to visit the beacon unit **2502** to update the programming. In yet another embodiment, the instruc-

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tion source **2618** may be an RF receiver circuit, an optical receiver circuit, or an acoustic receiver circuit. In such cases, the beacon unit **2502** may be updated by transmitting instructions on RF, optical or acoustic signals having a frequency appropriate for the respective receiver circuit.

Referring now to FIG. 27, there is illustrated a diagrammatic view of the beacon signal receiver circuit (i.e., "BSRC") **2508** of this embodiment and the associated wireless device **2510**. As previously described, the BSRC **2508** is disposed with the wireless device **2510**. In the illustrated embodiment, the BSRC **2508** has the form of an add-on module which is attached to the exterior shell **2702** of the wireless device **2510**. The two devices pass electronic signals through an electrical interface comprising cooperating electrical connectors **2704** and **2706** located on the BSRC **2508** and wireless device **2510**, respectively. In alternative embodiments, however, the BSRC **2508** may be supplied as an integral part of the wireless device **2510**, and located entirely within its exterior shell **2702**. In such case, the interface between the BSRC **2508** and the wireless device **2510** would be an integral part of the overall device, and the discrete connectors **2704** and **2706** would be unnecessary.

The BSRC **2508** includes a receiver unit **2708** and a processor **2710**. The receiver unit **2708** is adapted to receive the beacon signal **2506** transmitted by the beacon unit **2502**. In the illustrated embodiment, the receiver unit **2708** is an RF receiver adapted to receive signals from the RF transmitter **2602**, and thus is provided with an antenna **2712** to improve reception. In other embodiments, however, the receiver unit **2708** may be an optical receiver or an acoustic receiver to correspond to the type of transmitter used by the beacon unit **2502**. In still other embodiments, the BSRC **2508** may include multiple receiver units of different types (e.g., an RF unit and an optical unit) or operating at different wavelengths. The beacon signal **2506** received by the receiver unit **2708** is then demodulated as necessary to extract the information content, e.g., the codes transmitted from the beacon unit memories **2612** and/or **2614**. Signals indicative of the received codes (or other information content) are then passed to the BSRC processor **2710**. In response to receiving the signals indicative of the received codes, the BSRC processor **2710** sends control signals across the interface **2704**, **2706** to the processor **2714** of the wireless device **2510**.

As previously discussed, the wireless device **2510** includes a processor **2714** operably connected to an RF transmitter/receiver unit **2716**. The RF transmitter/receiver unit **2716** transmits and receives RF signals **2516** to provide two-way communication between the wireless device **2510** and the computer network **306**. The wireless device **2510** may further include various types of a memory unit **2718**, a keypad, keyboard, touch pad or other user input device **2720**, a display screen **2722**, and an audio input/output device **2724** (e.g., speaker and/or microphone), depending on its exact type, i.e., whether it is a Internet-ready telephone, an Internet connected personal digital assistant or some other type of network wireless device. The control signals received by the wireless device processor **2714** from the BSRC processor **2710** cause the wireless device **2510** to send RF signals **2516** to the computer network **306** whereby the wireless device is connected to a specific remote location on the network. These RF signals **2516** may include components indicative of the codes received from the memory **2610** of the beacon unit **2502**.

In the embodiment shown in FIG. 27, an electronic memory device **2726** is operably connected to the BSRC

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processor **2710**. The memory device **2626** includes one or more memory locations which store data, i.e., "codes", that can be retrieved by the BSRC processor **2710**. The BSRC processor **2710** can send signals indicative of the retrieved code to the wireless device processor **2714**, which in turn may incorporate the code as a component of the RF signal **2516** used to connect the wireless device **2510** to the remote site on the computer network **306**. Thus, the RF signals **2516** transmitted by the wireless device **2510** may include components indicative of codes, or portions thereof, received from the memory **2610** of the beacon unit **2502** and/or components indicative of codes received from the memory **2726** of the BSRC **2508**.

In the illustrated embodiment, one memory location **2728** is provided in the memory device **2726** (denoted "SER. NO."). In this embodiment, the code is associated with a serial number for the individual BSRC **2508**. This is typically non-volatile memory. This serial number can be provided to the remote location to which the wireless device **2510** is connected to allow tracking of inquiries or the collection of data regarding the effectiveness of the system. In another embodiment, the code may be associated with a type descriptor characterizing the type of BSRC **2508**. This type descriptor, when transmitted to the advertiser server **312**, may allow selection of a remote location on the network having content which is optimized for display on the particular type of BSRC being connected. In other embodiments, the code located in the memory location **2728** may be associated with the address of a remote location on the network **306**, for example the location of the advertiser server **312**.

Once the wireless device **2510** has received the codes from the beacon unit **2502** and the BSRC **2508**, the connection of the wireless device to a remote location on the computer network **306** may be accomplished generally as described for previous embodiments receiving codes from external devices, e.g., from bar code readers, audio tones embedded in broadcasts or recorded media. For example, as illustrated in FIG. 25, a first computer, e.g., the ARS **308**, is disposed on the computer network **306**. A computer database, e.g., the advertiser database **310**, is operably connected to the first computer **308**. The computer database **310** includes a plurality of routing information for remote locations on the computer network and a plurality of first codes (i.e., corresponding to the codes from the beacon unit memory **2612**) and associating each of the routing information with at least one of the first codes. Upon receiving a message packet (i.e., a signal containing information components which are indicative of the first code) transmitted from the wireless device **2510** across the network **306**, the first computer **308** accesses the computer database **310**, retrieves the routing information associated with the particular first code, and transmits the routing information associated with the particular first code across the computer network back to the wireless device. It will be readily apparent that, in some embodiments the routing information in the database **310** may be further associated with a plurality of additional codes (e.g., second code from beacon unit memory **2614** and third code from BSRC memory **2728**) to allow for further refining of the selection of routing information to be transmitted back to the wireless device **2510**.

In response to receiving the routing information associated with the particular first code (and any additional codes, if applicable, as described above) from the first computer **308**, the wireless device **2510** then sends a second message packet across the network to a remote location as directed by

the routing information just received. This may be the desired remote location, or alternatively, codes incorporated into the second message packet may be evaluated to select a particular remote location from among a plurality of locations accessible through this site. Once the determination has been made, the wireless device **2510** is connected to the desired remote site on the network **306**. In most cases, information content will be returned from the remote site to the wireless device for further evaluation or display to the user.

Referring now to FIGS. **28a–28d**, there is illustrated a flowchart of the process for connecting a wireless device to a remote location on a computer network in accordance with another aspect of the invention. The process begins in the “START” block **2802** (FIG. **28a**) and then proceeds to function block **2804**, wherein the beacon unit processor **2606** retrieves the code or codes from the beacon unit memory **2610**. In the illustrated embodiment, a first and second code are retrieved from the beacon unit memory. The process then proceeds to function block **2806**, wherein the beacon unit **2502** transmits as a continual and/or repetitive broadcast into the target zone the beacon signal **2506** which incorporates information indicative of the first code and the second code. The process then proceeds to function block **2808**, wherein the BSRC **2508** which is within the target zone receives the beacon signal **2506** and extracts the first and second codes. If the BSRC **2508** includes a memory unit **2726** (this test being represented by the decision block **2809**), the process then proceeds to function block **2810** where the BSRC processor **2710** retrieves the code or codes from the BSRC memory. If the BSRC **2508** does not include a memory unit, then function block **2810** is omitted. The process then proceeds to function block **2812** (FIG. **28b**), wherein the BSRC processor **2710** passes the first, second, and/or third codes (as applicable) to the processor **2714** of the wireless device **2510** for buffering therein.

Once the wireless device **2510** receives the signals indicative of codes from the BSRC **2508**, the process then proceeds to function block **2814**, wherein the wireless device sends RF signals **2516** having a first message packet which incorporates the codes via the ISP **2518** to a first location on the network **306**. In some embodiments, e.g., where the codes from the beacon unit **2502** actually include embedded routing information to the desired remote location, e.g., location **2526** (FIG. **25**), the first message packet may be routed directly to the desired remote location on the network **306** using the routing information from the code. In the illustrated embodiment, however, the codes in the RF signals **2516** do not contain embedded routing information relating to the desired remote location. Therefore, it is necessary for the first message packet to be routed to a known intermediate site, e.g., ARS **308**, where the codes can be used to retrieve the necessary routing information from a database, e.g., database **310**. In such case, the RF signals **2516** will incorporate default routing information necessary to guide the first message packet to the intermediate location. It will be understood however, that this fixed routing information, i.e., to an intermediate location used to obtain further routing information to remote sites, is to be distinguished from the routing information to the desired remote location. The process next proceeds to function block **2816**, wherein the intermediate server **308** receives the message packet including the codes received from the beacon unit **2502** and/or BSRC **2508** and extracts the codes. The process then proceeds to function block **2818**, wherein the intermediate server **308** accesses the computer database **310** and retrieves the routing information associated with the codes.

After retrieving the routing information associated with the codes received from the beacon unit **2502** and/or BSRC **2508** from the computer database **310**, the process continues to function block **2820**, wherein the intermediate server **308** sends another message packet including the routing information back across the network **306** to the wireless device **2510**. The process then proceeds to function block **2822** (FIG. **28c**), wherein the wireless device **2510** sends a second message packet across the network **308** to a remote location using the routing information just retrieved from the intermediate site **308**. The second message packet may also include some or all of the codes received from the beacon unit **2502** and/or BSRC **2508**. The process then proceeds to function block **2824**, wherein the second message packet is received at the remote location specified by the routing information retrieved from the intermediate site **308**. As represented by the decision block **2826**, in some embodiments, this remote location may be the desired remote location **2526**, in which case the process proceeds to function block **2828** and the connection of the wireless device **2510** to a remote location on the network has been completed (as denoted in function block **2830**). In the illustrated embodiment, however, this location is a “portal” site, e.g., advertiser server **312**, providing access to a plurality of additional remote locations on the network, e.g., content locations designated by reference numbers **2526** and **2528**. In this latter case, the process proceeds from decision block **2826** to function block **2832**. In the function block **2832**, the codes in the second message packet (which originated from the beacon unit **2502** and/or BSRC **2508**) are used to access a database or lookup table at the portal location **312** associating each of the plurality of remote locations with one or more of the codes. This process then also proceeds to function block **2830**, wherein the associated one of the plurality of remote locations, i.e., the desired location **2526**, is connected to the wireless device to complete the basic process.

In the illustrated embodiment, the process is extended beyond the basic process to an additional function block **2832**, wherein information content from the remote site **2526** is sent back across the network **306** to the wireless device **2510**. The extended process next proceeds to function block **2834**, wherein content from the desired remote location is received by the wireless device **2510**. The extended process then proceeds to function block **2836**, wherein the received content is further processed or displayed by the wireless device **2510** to the user. The extended process then proceeds to the “END” block **2832** indicating that the extended process is complete.

Referring now to FIG. **29**, there is illustrated an aerial view (i.e., plan view) of a geographic region **2900** in which an embodiment of the system has been deployed. The geographic region **2900** includes a first roadway **2514**, a second roadway **2902**, an intersection **2904** between the two, and a retail establishment **2906** disposed alongside the second roadway. In this embodiment, three beacon units denoted by reference numerals **2502a**, **2502b** and **2502c**, respectively, are positioned along the first roadway **2514**. The beacon units may be mounted on antenna towers, billboards, buildings or even smaller structures such as park benches, depending upon the type of beacon and coverage range required. In this example, each of the beacon units **2502a**, **2502b** and **2502c** transmits an RF beacon signal **2506** using an omnidirectional antenna **2604**, resulting in circular target regions **2910a**, **2910b** and **2910c**, respectively. In this embodiment, the beacon units **2502a**, **2502b** and **2502c** are spaced apart a distance **D1** which is greater than the sum of

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the radii for adjacent target regions, thus, the target regions **2910a**, **2910b** and **2910c** form “cells” which do not overlap. This arrangement allows adjacent beacon units to broadcast beacon signals on the same frequency without interfering with one another, and it also allows the BSRC **2508** to utilize a single reception frequency. It will be apparent, however, that other embodiments of the invention may employ beacon units transmitting on different and/or multiple frequencies and beacon signal receiver units receiving on different and/or multiple frequencies.

Referring still to FIG. 29, as the automobile **2512** travels along the first roadway **2514** in the direction indicated by arrow **2912**, it passes sequentially through the target regions **2910a** and **2910b** (as indicated by phantom lines) to its current position in target region **2910c**. A BSRC **2508** operably connected to a wireless device **2510** in the automobile **2512** will therefore sequentially receive beacon signals from each of the beacon units **2502a**, **2502b** and **2502c**. As previously described, the wireless device **2510** may be connected to a remote site on the network upon receiving each of the beacon signals. For example, the first beacon unit **2502a** may cause the wireless device **2510** to connect to a remote location providing geographically relevant information regarding the nearby retail establishment **2906** and indicating that it can be reached by turning at an upcoming intersection. The third beacon unit **2502c**, whose target area **2910c** covers the intersection **2904**, may cause the wireless device **2510** to connect to a remote location also providing geographically relevant information, i.e., that the driver should turn onto roadway **2902** at the current intersection (i.e., intersection **2904**) to reach establishment **2906**. On the other hand, the second beacon unit **2502b**, may cause the wireless device **2510** to connect to a remote location which provides information having no geographical relevance, e.g., information relating to the product advertised on an adjacent billboard.

It will be appreciated that, while all the previously described embodiments utilize a beacon unit **2502** having a fixed geographic location, this is not a requirement of the invention. In other embodiments, the beacon unit **2502** may be mounted on a vehicle, e.g., a bus, a taxi, a truck, a train, an automobile, or even an aircraft, and equipped with a mobile power supply so that it may transmit the beacon signal **2506** as the vehicle moves. The target area of the beacon signal transmission thus moves as the vehicle moves, encompassing various wireless devices whether they are moving or stationary. Those wireless devices equipped with a compatible BSRC **2508** may then be automatically connected to a remote location on a network as previously described.

Although the preferred embodiment has been described in detail, it should be understood that various changes, substitutions and alterations can be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for connecting a wireless device to a remote location on a computer network, the method comprising the steps of:

- a) transmitting a beacon signal from a beacon unit disposed at a first geographic location, the beacon signal including components indicative of a first code and of a second code, the first code being associated with a remote location on a computer network and the second code being associated with an attribute of the beacon unit;

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- b) receiving the beacon signal using a beacon signal receiver circuit disposed in association with a wireless device at a second geographic location, and extracting from the received beacon signal the first code and the second code;
- c) automatically sending, in response to receiving the beacon signal and without user intervention, control signals indicative of the first code and the second code from the beacon signal receiver circuit to the wireless device;
- d) automatically transmitting, in response to receiving the control signals and without user intervention, an RF signal constituting a first message packet from the wireless device to an intermediate location on the computer network, the first message packet being indicative of the first code and the second code;
- e) receiving the first message packet at the intermediate location on the computer network extracting the first code and the second code therefrom;
- f) accessing a computer database from the intermediate location, the database including a plurality of routing information for remote locations on the computer network and a plurality of first codes and associating each of the routing information with at least one of the first codes, and retrieving the routing information associated with the first code received in the beacon signal;
- g) transmitting a reply packet including the routing information associated with the first code from the intermediate location across the computer network to the wireless device; and
- h) transmitting, in response to receiving the reply packet, a second message packet from the wireless device to a remote location on the network using the routing information just received, thereby connecting the wireless device to the associated remote location.

2. A method in accordance with claim 1, wherein the step of transmitting a second message packet from the wireless device to a remote location further comprises the sub-step of transmitting the first code to the remote location.

3. A method in accordance with claim 1, wherein the step of transmitting a second message packet from the wireless device to a remote location further comprises the sub-step of transmitting the second code to the remote location.

4. A method in accordance with claim 1, wherein:

the computer database further includes a plurality of second codes which are associated with the plurality of routing information for remote locations on the computer network; and

the step of accessing a computer database from the intermediate location further comprises the sub-steps of:

- a) determining whether more than one of the routing information are associated with the first code received in the beacon signal; and
- b) if so, selecting for retrieval such routing information which is also associated with the second code.

5. A method in accordance with claim 4, wherein the step of transmitting a second message packet from the wireless device to a remote location further comprises the sub-step of transmitting the first code to the remote location.

6. A method in accordance with claim 4, wherein the step of transmitting a second message packet from the wireless device to a remote location further comprises the sub-step of transmitting the second code to the remote location.

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7. A method in accordance with claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

- a) retrieving, prior to sending control signals from the beacon signal receiver circuit to the wireless device, a third code from a memory unit of the beacon signal receiver circuit, the third code being associated with an attribute of the beacon signal receiver circuit;
- b) sending, in response to receiving the beacon signal, control signals indicative of the third code from the beacon signal receiver circuit to the wireless device;
- c) transmitting, as a component of the RF signal constituting the first message packet, signals indicative of the third code; and
- d) extracting the third code from the first message packet at the intermediate location.

8. A method in accordance with claim 7, wherein the step of transmitting a second message packet from the wireless device to a remote location further comprises the sub-step of transmitting the third code to the remote location.

9. A method in accordance with claim 7, wherein:

the computer database further includes a plurality of third codes which are associated with the plurality of routing information for remote locations on the computer network; and

the step of accessing a computer database from the intermediate location further comprises the sub-steps of:

- a) determining whether more than one of the routing information are associated with the first code received in the beacon signal; and
- b) if so, selecting for retrieval such routing information which is also associated with the third code.

10. A method in accordance with claim 9, wherein:

the computer database further includes a plurality of second codes which are associated with the plurality of routing information for remote locations on the computer network; and

the step of accessing a computer database from the intermediate location further comprises the sub-steps of:

- a) determining whether more than one of the routing information are associated with both the first code and the third code received in the beacon signal; and
- b) if so, selecting for retrieval such routing information which is also associated with the second code.

11. A method for connecting a wireless device to a remote sender on a computer network, the wireless device including a processor and a transmitter/receiver for sending and receiving radio frequency signals to provide two-way digital communication between the processor and the computer network, the method comprising the steps of:

- a) transmitting a beacon signal from a beacon unit disposed at a first geographic location, the beacon signal including components indicative of a first code and of a second code, the first code being associated with a remote location on a computer network and the second code being associated with an attribute of the beacon unit;
- b) receiving the beacon signal with a beacon signal receiver circuit disposed with the wireless device, the beacon signal receiver circuit being operably connected to the processor of the wireless device;
- c) extracting the first code and the second code from the beacon signal using the beacon signal receiver circuit;

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d) automatically sending control signals including the first code and the second code from the beacon signal receiver circuit to the processor of the wireless device without user intervention;

e) automatically transmitting RF signals, in response to receiving the control signals including the first code and the second code from the beacon signal receiver circuit without user intervention, from the wireless device to the computer network;

f) connecting the wireless device to a remote location on the computer network which is associated with the first code;

g) transmitting a reply packet including the routing information associated with the first code from the intermediate location across the computer network to the wireless device; and

h) transmitting, in response to receiving the reply packet, a second message packet from the wireless device to a remote location on the network, using the routing information just received, thereby connecting the wireless device to the associated remote location.

12. A method in accordance with claim 11, wherein the beacon signal is a radio frequency (RF) signal.

13. A method in accordance with claim 12, wherein the frequency of the RF beacon signal is different from the frequency used by the RF transmitter/receiver of the wireless device to communicate with the network.

14. A method in accordance with claim 11, wherein the beacon signal is an optical signal.

15. A method in accordance with claim 11, wherein the beacon signal is an acoustic signal.

16. A method in accordance with claim 11, wherein the step of transmitting a beacon signal from the beacon unit further includes the sub-steps of:

- a) accessing, prior to transmitting the beacon signal, a beacon unit memory using a beacon unit processor, the beacon unit processor being operably connected to the beacon unit memory;
- b) retrieving the first code from a memory location in the beacon unit memory using the beacon unit processor;
- c) passing the first code from the beacon unit processor to a modulator constituting a third portion of the beacon unit, the modulator being operably connected to the processor; and
- d) modulating a carrier signal with the modulator to include modulation indicative of the first code for transmission as a component of the beacon signal.

17. A method in accordance with claim 16, wherein the first code includes routing information embedded therein which is sufficient, of itself, to direct the connection of the wireless device to the desired remote location on the network.

18. A method in accordance with claim 16, wherein the first code does not include routing information embedded therein which is sufficient, of itself, to direct the connection of the wireless device to the desired remote location on the network.

19. A method in accordance with claim 18, wherein the step of connecting the wireless device to a remote location on the computer network further comprises the steps of:

- a) sending a first message packet from the wireless device to an intermediate location on the network, the first message packet including information indicative of the first code;
- b) receiving the first message packet at the intermediate location and extracting the first code therefrom;

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- c) accessing a computer database from the intermediate location, the database including a plurality of routing information for remote locations on the computer network and a plurality of first codes and associating each of the routing information with at least one of the first codes, and retrieving the routing information associated with the first code received in the beacon signal;
- d) transmitting the routing information associated with the first code from the intermediate location across the computer network to the wireless device; and
- e) transmitting, in response to receiving the routing information associated with the first code, a second message packet from the wireless device to a different remote

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location on the network as directed by the routing information just received.

20. A method in accordance with claim 19, further comprising the steps of:

- a) receiving the second message packet at the different remote location on the network;
- b) sending, in response to receiving the second message packet, information from the different remote location back across the network to the wireless device; and
- c) receiving with the wireless device the information from the different remote location and displaying the information to a user.

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